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ABSTRACT

The United States is a violent nation. This report reviews current school, community, and mass media strategies; describes promising programs now in operation; and offers recommendations for how police and other criminal justice professionals can get involved. By introducing the basic concepts and strategies of violence prevention, the report encourages even more criminal justice professionals to join this effort. Four important methods public health specialists recommend for preventing youth violence are: (1) improve young people's perspective-taking skills--people are more likely to aggress if they see a provocation as deliberate; (2) have young people focus on the negative consequences of violence--in general, aggressive responses are inhibited when people are afraid to aggress or anticipate feelings of guilt; (3) teach young people how to negotiate nonviolent solutions to conflict--solutions that meet both disputants' needs, including the need to save face; and (4) instruct youngsters to look for signs that a conflict might spin out of control. Fights usually go through a predictable sequence of steps before escalating into violence. It is hoped that such efforts will help young people manage conflicts and allow them to channel their anger into constructive problem solving, rather than turn to violence as their first response. (RJM)

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# National Institute of Justice

*Issues and Practices*

ED 378 522

# Preventing Interpersonal Violence Among Youth

## An Introduction to School, Community, and Mass Media Strategies

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**U.S. Department of Justice**
Office of Justice Programs
*National Institute of Justice*

# Preventing Interpersonal Violence Among Youth

## An Introduction to School, Community, and Mass Media Strategies

by
William DeJong, Ph.D.

Department of Health and Social Behavior
Harvard School of Public Health

November 1994

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*Issues and Practices in Criminal Justice* is a publication series of the National Institute of Justice. Each report presents the program options and management issues in a topic area, based on a review of research and evaluation findings, operational experience, and expert opinion on the subject. The intent is to provide information to make informed choices in planning, implementing, and improving programs and practice in criminal justice.

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## National Institute of Justice

Paul Cascarano
Assistant Director

Marilyn Moses
Program Monitor

*Advisory Panel*

Dr. Carl C. Bell
Community Mental Health Council
8704 South Constance Avenue
Chicago, Illinois 60617

Dr. Felton J. Earls
Harvard School of Public Health
677 Huntington Avenue
Boston, Massachusetts 02115

Dr. Kenneth Powell
Division of Injury Control
Centers for Disease Control
Atlanta, Georgia 30333

Dr. Deborah Prothrow-Stith
Harvard School of Public Health
677 Huntington Avenue
Boston, Massachusetts 02115

Renee Wilson-Brewer
Education Development Center, Inc.
55 Chapel Street
Newton, Massachusetts 02160

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# Foreword

As demonstrated by the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program in New York City, the Boston Violence Prevention Project, and the other school, community, and mass media efforts described in this *Issues and Practices* report, a key to violence prevention among youth is *education*—to teach young people how to manage conflict and channel their anger into constructive problem solving, rather than turning to violence as their first response.

To change the climate of violence that pervades our Nation's cities; to change the attitudes, beliefs, and expectations that feed that climate; and to teach young people how to resolve conflict peacefully, *all* elements of our communities must be involved.

The hope of the National Institute of Justice is that, inspired by the work described in this report, increasing numbers of police and other criminal justice professionals will join with teachers, youth workers, clergy, and other community leaders to explore how they might contribute to preventing violence among youth, whether it be contributing to ongoing efforts or taking the lead in establishing new programs.

Jeremy Travis
*Director*
**National Institute of Justice**

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I thank Linda Lantieri, Tom Roderick, Michael Hirschhorn, and their staffs, as well as the student mediators, teachers, and school principals who so graciously accommodated my site visit to the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP). Their enthusiastic dedication proves that "RCCP is not just a program, it's a way of life."

I am also grateful to Linda Hudson and her staff for their hospitality during my site visit to the Boston Violence Prevention Project (VPP) and Dr. Alice Hausman of Temple University for sharing early drafts of her evaluation of the VPP.

I thank Marilyn Moses of the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and Cathy Conly and Jeff Roth of Abt Associates for their support and guidance. Their constructive criticism and gentle prodding was greatly appreciated, if not always acknowledged.

As a medical student working in the emergency room (ER) at Boston City Hospital, an inner-city facility that serves the poor and working class, Dr. Deborah Prothrow-Stith was shocked by the nightly carnage that she saw, much of it caused by shootings, knifings, and other forms of violence.

One night, when a young patient she had just treated told her to be ready for the next guy, the one *he* would be sending to the ER, she suddenly realized that, as a physician, she had to do much more about the problem of violence than patch kids up and send them back on the streets.

From that insight, her life's work—shaping and giving voice to the public health community's efforts to prevent violence—was launched. First as a co-founder of the Health Promotion Center for Urban Youth in Boston's Department of Health and Hospitals, then as commissioner of the Massachusetts Department of Public Health, and now as a professor at the Harvard School of Public Health, Dr. Prothrow-Stith has been a leader in the national movement to define violence as a public health issue and to use public health strategies for its prevention.

I dedicate this *Issues and Practices* report to Dr. Prothrow-Stith, both to acknowledge her pioneering work and to thank her for the inspiration she has provided to so many of us who care about our Nation's health.

William DeJong, Ph.D.
**Department of Health and Social Behavior**
**Harvard School of Public Health**

# Table of Contents


*Page*

**Foreword** ..... **iii**

**Acknowledgments** ..... **v**

**Executive Summary** ..... **xi**

**Chapter 1: Interpersonal Violence Among Youth** ..... 1

The Numbers Behind the Story ..... 1

A Culture of Violence ..... 2
Readiness To Use Violence ..... 2
Prevalence of Weapons ..... 3
Beliefs Supporting the Use of Violence ..... 4

Introduction to the Report ..... 6

Endnotes ..... 7

**Chapter 2: Understanding Violent Behavior** ..... 11

Homicide: A Profile ..... 11

The Public Health Perspective ..... 12
The Host ..... 12
The Agent ..... 13
The Environment ..... 13

Implications for Prevention ..... 14

Endnotes ..... 15

**Chapter 3: School-Based Strategies: Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (New York, New York)** ..... **19**

RCCP Program Philosophy ..... 20
The Nature of Conflict ..... 20
A Focus on School Change ..... 20
A Focus on Appreciating Diversity ..... 20
The Need for a Long-Term Commitment ..... 21

Conflict Resolution Curriculum ..... 21
Elementary School Curriculum ..... 21
Secondary School Curriculum ..... 25

Professional Training ..... 25

*Page*

Student Mediation Program ..... 26
The Mediation Program in Action ..... 26
Mediator Selection and Training ..... 28

Parent Training ..... 29

Organization and Budget ..... 29

Evaluation ..... 30
Mediation Program ..... 31

The Future ..... 31

Endnotes ..... 32

**Chapter 4: Community-Based Strategies: Violence Prevention Project (Boston, Massachusetts) ..... 35**

VPP Program Philosophy ..... 36
The Nature of Conflict ..... 36
Changing a Community Ethos ..... 36

Violence Prevention Curriculum ..... 36
Lesson Plans ..... 37
Assessment ..... 38
Curriculum Adaptations ..... 38

Training Community-Based Agencies ..... 38
Summer Camps ..... 40
Youth Leadership Program ..... 40

Coalition Building ..... 42

Media Campaign ..... 42

Clinical Intervention ..... 43

Organization and Budget ..... 45

Evaluation ..... 45

The Future ..... 46

Endnotes ..... 46

**Chapter 5: Mass Media Strategies ..... 49**

Walk Away From Violence ..... 50

Stop the Violence ..... 52

Family Violence: Breaking the Chain ..... 53

Alternative Media Strategies ..... 53
Generating News Coverage ..... 53
Lobbying the Entertainment Industry ..... 54
Developing Special Programming ..... 55

*Page*

Conclusions ..... 55

Endnotes ..... 55

**Chapter 6: Expanding the Role of Criminal Justice Professionals in Violence Prevention ..... 59**

School-Based Strategies ..... 59

Community-Based Strategies ..... 60
Boston, Massachusetts ..... 61
Columbia, South Carolina ..... 61
Houston, Texas ..... 61
Jacksonville, Florida ..... 61

Mass Media Strategies ..... 61

The Continuing Challenge ..... 62

Endnotes ..... 62

## Appendices

Appendix A: Second Step (Seattle, Washington) ..... 65

Appendix B: Youth at Risk Program (San Francisco, California) ..... 67

Appendix C: Program Directory ..... 69

## List of Figures

Figure 1.1: Percentage of High School Students in Agreement With Attitude and Belief Statements That Support the Use of Violence ..... 3

Figure 1.2: Percentage of High School Students in Disagreement With Attitude and Belief Statements That Support the Use of Nonviolence ..... 4

Figure 1.3: Percentage of High School Students Giving Incorrect Responses to a True-False Test About Violence ..... 5

Figure 1.4: Percentage of High School Students in Disagreement With Attitude and Belief Statements That Imply Personal Control Over Violence ..... 6

Figure 3.1: Student Peace Pledges ..... 22–23

Figure 3.2: Hints for De-Escalating a Conflict ..... 24

Figure 3.3: RCCP Student Mediation Program: Steps for a Successful Mediation ..... 27

Figure 4.1: Profile: A Typical Homicide ..... 37

Figure 4.2: A Fight at Camp: One Conflict, Two Perspectives ..... 41

Figure 4.3: Campaign Poster: Friends for Life Don't Let Friends Fight ..... 44

Figure 5.1: Billboards: Walk Away From Violence Campaign, Detroit, Michigan ..... 51

# Executive Summary

## Introduction

The United States is a violent Nation. Homicide is the 11th leading cause of death in the United States, with an estimated 23,760 murders in 1992. Violence is an especially severe problem among our youth. According to data from the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports, more than 11,000 persons died in the United States between 1980 and 1989 as a result of homicides committed by high school-aged youth who used a weapon of some type.

Several new prevention programs have been started during the past decade to meet the challenge of youth violence. Many of these programs focus on teaching anger management and conflict resolution skills to youth. Other programs seek to increase contact between youth and appropriate role models through sports and recreation, remedial education, and mentoring programs. Often, it is police and other criminal justice professionals who have taken the lead in developing these programs.

This *Issues and Practices* report reviews current school, community, and mass media strategies, describes the most promising programs now in operation, and offers recommendations for how police and other criminal justice professionals can get involved. By introducing the basic concepts and strategies of violence prevention, the report is designed to encourage even more criminal justice professionals to join this vital effort.

## Understanding Violent Behavior

The public normally thinks of homicide as either a premeditated crime or as the unfortunate consequence of a criminal act such as robbery. In fact, in 1992 almost half of all murder victims were either related to (12 percent) or acquainted with (35 percent) their assailants.

Most of these acquaintance murders are committed impulsively, in a moment of anger during an argument. In 1992, 29 percent of all murders were determined to be the result of an argument. That same year, firearms were used in 68 percent of all homicides, handguns in about 55 percent. Alcohol use is another major factor; considered together, about half of all perpetrators or victims have consumed alcohol before the homicide.

The field of public health analyzes health problems in terms of the host, the agent, and the environment. This perspective reminds us that violence is a complex behavior, with antecedents in biology, childhood experience, community norms, and social and economic conditions.

The *host* is defined as a person whose behavior may determine or contribute to a public health problem. Men are at greatest risk for assaultive violence, especially teens and young adults. For many young men, there is a preoccupation with machismo, a need to prove their manhood through toughness, aggressive posturing, even violence, especially when they are challenged by their peers.

Additional perspective on the role of the host in interpersonal violence comes from psychological studies of aggression. With this research in mind, public health specialists have drawn four important conclusions about how to prevent youth violence.

First, it is essential to improve young people's perspective-taking skills. People are more likely to aggress if they see a threat or provocation as deliberate, malicious in intent, and avoidable. With improved skills, young people will be open to alternative, less anger-provoking interpretations of other people's behavior.

Second, it is important to focus young people on the negative consequences of violence, not only for society as a whole, but for the person who contemplates taking aggressive action. In general, aggressive responses are inhibited when people are afraid to aggress or anticipate feelings of guilt.

Third, we must teach young people how to negotiate nonviolent solutions to conflict—solutions that meet both disputants' needs, including the need to save face. Clearly, more general problem-solving abilities come into play here. People are less likely to aggress if they have a range of response alternatives from which to choose.

Fourth, we must teach young people to be vigilant for signs that a conflict might spin out of control. Fights usually go through a predictable sequence of steps before escalating to

violence. The key is to recognize when this process is under way and to have the good sense to walk away if it cannot be defused.

The public health perspective has brought renewed attention to the weaponry of violence, what public health specialists refer to as the *agent*. To deal with this aspect of the violence problem, there have been calls to restrict severely the sales of handguns and other firearms, even to ban ownership altogether. Whether there is the political will to take such action and whether the ensuing legislation would meet constitutional requirements remain to be seen. This issue aside, there is a clear need to minimize young people's ready access to weapons.

By the *environment*, public health specialists mean the broader social, cultural, institutional, and physical forces that contribute to a public health problem. Criminologists and public health experts have identified several factors that create a social context that breeds violence. Many of these factors translate into an inability by families and communities to transmit positive values to young people, to communicate a sense of hope about the future, or to teach problem-solving, communication, and nonviolent conflict resolution skills.

Among the environmental factors receiving the greatest attention is *media violence*. There have been several public inquiries into the effects of viewing television violence. Unfortunately, these and other reviews of the research literature have done little to quell the fierce and highly politicized controversy over the meaning of this research.

## School-Based Strategies: Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (New York, New York)

The Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP) is a school-based conflict resolution and mediation program jointly sponsored by the New York City Public Schools and Educators for Social Responsibility–Metro (ESR), a nonprofit organization dedicated to conflict resolution and multicultural education. Started in 1985, this K–12 program is now in place in 180 elementary, junior high, and high schools in the city, with 3,000 teachers and 70,000 students participating.

RCCP's year-long curricula share two important features. First, they concentrate on several component skills: active listening, assertiveness (as opposed to aggressiveness or passivity), expressing feelings, perspective-taking, cooperation, and negotiation. Without proficiency in these skills, RCCP argues, students will be ill-equipped to find peaceful solutions to conflict. Learning these skills requires weekly practice, so teachers are encouraged to do at least one "peace lesson" a week throughout the school year, to use "teachable moments" that arise because of events in the classroom or the world at large, and to "infuse" conflict resolution lessons into the regular academic program. Second, the lessons are built around role-playing, interviewing, group dialogue, brainstorming, and other experiential learning strategies, all of which require a high degree of student participation and interaction.

What most distinguishes RCCP from other primary prevention programs is its focus on creating school change, a mission consistent with the ESR philosophy, which states that conflict resolution "is best taught in the context of a caring community characterized by cooperation, effective communication, emotional strength, appreciation of differences, recognition of common purposes, and shared decision making." By creating a "peaceable school," a safe environment where students are encouraged to experiment with peaceful ways of resolving conflict, RCCP teachers strive to give their students a new image of what their world can be.

For this to happen, however, the teachers themselves must change. They must learn and then apply a new set of skills for heading off and resolving conflict. Even more difficult, they must adopt a new style of classroom management, one that fundamentally involves a sharing of power with students so that they can learn how to deal with their own disputes. To create this change, RCCP has instituted an intensive program of teacher education. It goes beyond formal training on the RCCP curriculum to include a series of 6 to 10 classroom visits per year, one-on-one consultations, and after-school meetings with RCCP staff.

The student mediation program, a key component of RCCP's plan for school change, provides strong peer models for nonviolent conflict resolution and reinforces students' emerging skills in working out their own problems. Ultimately, by reducing the number of fights between students, it can contribute to a more peaceful school climate. Student mediation is not a substitute for an effective school discipline policy, for if strictly enforced sanctions against fighting are not in place, students are unlikely to turn to the mediators for help.

As RCCP looks to the future, parent education will be a top priority. RCCP staff recently launched a parent involvement program, which they piloted and are slowly expanding. With this program, a team of two or three parents per school is

trained for 60 hours to lead workshops for other parents on intergroup relations, family communication, and conflict resolution. To date, nearly 300 parents have received training.

## Community-Based Strategies: Violence Prevention Project (Boston, Massachusetts)

The Violence Prevention Project (VPP) is a community-based outreach and education project run by Boston's Department of Health and Hospitals as part of its Health Promotion Program for Urban Youth. The project began in 1986 as a three-year pilot program, with an initial focus on two neighborhoods, Roxbury and South Boston. Based on the results of that pilot effort, the project was made an integral part of the Mayor's Safe Neighborhoods Plan and now has a citywide focus.

VPP began with development of the *Violence Prevention Curriculum for Adolescents*, a high school curriculum developed by Dr. Deborah Prothrow-Stith. As the curriculum was introduced, VPP's leadership realized that working in the schools alone was not enough. VPP's core activity is to teach staff from community-based youth agencies how to use lessons from the high school curriculum in their own violence prevention program.

In VPP's first year, its community education program was coupled with the reinforcing power of a mass media campaign, which was developed *pro bono* through the Advertising Club of Greater Boston. Designed to raise public awareness of the issue of adolescent violence, the campaign featured a set of public service announcements (PSAs) on the role of peer pressure and the responsibility that friends have for helping to defuse conflict situations.

More recently, VPP has launched several experiments that might emerge as important components of its future program. One is a peer leadership program, for which VPP staff recruits, trains, and supervises a small group of youth leaders who do conflict resolution and violence prevention work among their peers. Another is a program for summer camps, which combines firm camp policies in support of nonviolent conflict resolution with training for the counselors and other camp staff.

In the next phase of its work, VPP is seeking to organize a coalition of service providers, teachers and school administrators, juvenile justice officials, parents, and other community residents concerned about youth violence. In VPP's view, agencies that participate in a coalition are more likely to institutionalize their own violence prevention activities, thereby achieving one of the project's key objectives.

## Mass Media Strategies

The mass media, especially television, exert enormous influence over our ideas, values, and behavior. The negative impact of the media, especially the portrayal of violence in entertainment, has long been a concern to violence prevention experts, but the idea that the media might be used as a force for violence prevention is just now catching hold. Leaders in the anti-violence movement are showing increased interest in using the mass media as an adjunct to their school and community programs.

Three recent campaigns illustrate how a mass media campaign can work in sync with school and community efforts: (1) "Walk Away from Violence," sponsored by the Wayne County, Michigan, Department of Public Health; (2) "Stop the Violence," cosponsored by Jive Records and the National Urban League; and (3) "Family Violence: Breaking the Chain," which was developed and aired by WBZ-TV in Boston.

Mass media campaigns can be used to achieve four principal objectives: (1) to educate the public about the nature and scope of the violence problem and to keep it at the top of the public agenda; (2) to inform citizens about their community's attack on the problem and inspire their full participation; (3) to build support for changes in institutional arrangements, public policy, or law that will reduce violence; and (4) to reinforce the lessons of school and community programs by repeating key facts, demonstrating conflict resolution skills, and communicating a shift in social norms away from violence.

Mass media campaigns have traditionally involved the use of public service advertising, including radio and television PSAs, print ads, billboards, posters, and printed literature. More recently, several media experts have argued that campaign planners should think more broadly about the use of the mass media to include news and entertainment programming as part of a single, unified campaign.

There is an emerging recognition in the entertainment community that the public prefers nonviolent, family-oriented entertainment. Studies of television programming and movies have shown negative correlations between amount of violent content and their popularity. The assumption that violence sells is not borne out by the facts.

## Expanding the Role of Criminal Justice Professionals in Violence Prevention

A missing element in most violence prevention programs, including those described in this report, is the high-profile involvement of criminal justice professionals, especially police officers. The idea that criminal justice professionals, especially police, should be involved in violence prevention is consistent with contemporary notions of problem-oriented or community policing, in which police as individuals and as an institution, can assume an innovative and participatory role in community life.

There are several efforts now under way in which police are taking a leadership role in violence prevention. To date, however, none of these programs has been evaluated. In general, the field of violence prevention suffers from a dearth of sound outcome evaluations, which obviously retards the emergence of more effective strategies. As criminal justice agencies begin to develop new programs, they must seek or set aside funds for both process evaluations and outcome evaluations that use control group comparisons. Doing so will enable them to establish a leadership position in this field.

Most programs in which criminal justice professionals have been involved focus on reaching the individual child. Giving individualized attention to at-risk youth is essential, of cours. But as a prevention perspective makes clear, we must also address the multitude of environmental conditions that promote or inhibit the learning and maintenance of aggression.

Ultimately, then, we must not only impose fair, swift, and sure punishment for criminal behavior; we must not only teach young people how to manage their anger and channel it into constructive problem solving; we must also work toward improving educational opportunities, better housing, and economic development.

There is a role for police and other criminal justice professionals here, too. Working in concert with community leaders, they must become advocates for the neighborhoods they serve. Ultimately, that is what community policing is all about.

# Chapter 1

# Interpersonal Violence Among Youth

The story was alarming, but so much a part of the city's daily life that it warranted only a small write-up on page 23 of the next morning's edition of *The Boston Globe*: on January 25, 1994, a Charlestown High School junior was shot and wounded in the left thigh near the back steps of Boston Latin Academy, where he had planned on attending a citywide recycling program for special-needs students.

Authorities were not aware of a motive for the shooting. According to witnesses, however, the assailant had said to his victim, "You're from Academy," before shooting the teenager with a small-caliber handgun. Sources told the reporter that the assailant was referring to the Academy Homes housing development near the Roxbury-Jamaica Plain line.

Unfortunately, such violence is not a rare event in the Boston schools. On December 20, 1993, for example, a student at Madison Park High School in Roxbury was shot as he walked across the school's athletic field around 7:45 that morning.[1]

In a Nation that once thought of high school, with its football games and proms, as a time of fun, even as a time of innocence, the specter of teens carrying revolvers and knives to school has struck a new note of alarm among a public that otherwise seems inured to the violence that surrounds it.

There is an obvious and immediate need to prevent students from bringing weapons to school, which can be attempted through a variety of measures, including strict disciplinary codes and the use of metal detectors and locker checks.[2] More difficult to accomplish, however, is a change in the general climate of violence that prompts many students to carry a weapon for self-protection, despite the dangers that decision brings.[3]

## The Numbers Behind the Story

The United States is a violent Nation. Homicide is the 11th leading cause of death in the United States, with an estimated 23,760 murders in 1992.[4] As a cause of years of potential life lost before age 65, homicide ranks fourth.[5] Nonfatal assaults are an equally important problem. For every homicide, there are an estimated 100 assaults;[6] many resulting in serious injury that requires hospitalization.[7]

Violence is an especially severe problem among youth. According to data from the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports, more than 11,000 persons died in the United States between 1980 and 1989 as a result of homicides committed by high school-aged youth who used a weapon of some type. Firearm-related homicides accounted for more than 65 percent of these fatalities.[8]

Homicide is now the leading cause of death for young African-American men ages 15–34, with a homicide rate ranging between 5 and 10 times higher than for white men. Over a lifetime, the risk of death from homicide is 1 in 28 for African-American men, compared to 1 in 164 for white men.[9] Some studies suggest that it is the lower socioeconomic status of African-Americans that accounts for this difference.[10] Latino youth have a homicide rate lower than that of African-Americans but much higher than that of whites.[11]

These rates are accelerating: for African-American males between the ages of 15 and 19, the rate of homicides involving firearms more than doubled between 1984 and 1988.[12] In some cities, the news is even worse. In Detroit, for example, the homicide rate for African-American males ages 15–18 quadrupled between 1987 and 1988.[13]

The latest health objectives for the Nation, outlined by the U.S. Public Health Service in *Healthy People 2000: National Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Objectives*, include several related to assaultive violence, thus defining interpersonal violence as an important threat to public health.[14] These objectives are ambitious, but even if they were achieved, the United States would still remain among the most violent nations on earth:

- Reduce homicides to no more than 7.2 per 100,000 people. The age-adjusted rate in 1987 was 8.5 per 100,000, which is roughly twice the rate of Spain, the industrialized nation with the next highest homicide rate.[15]

- Reduce assaultive injuries among people age 12 and older to no more than 10 per 1,000 people, compared to the 1986 rate of 11.1 per 100,000.

*Healthy People 2000* also includes the objective of reducing by 20 percent the incidence of physical fighting among adolescents ages 14–17. Fighting among acquaintances is the immediate antecedent cause for many of the homicides that occur in this age group.[16]

## A Culture of Violence

If we are to reduce violence among American youth, then first we must learn what they say about the anger and violence in their lives. What emerges, unfortunately, is an alarming picture of young people caught up in a culture of violence—a system of beliefs, attitudes, expectations, and behavior that seems pervasive, entrenched, and self-perpetuating.

The data reported here come from a study conducted in 1987 to field-test and evaluate a violence prevention curriculum for high school students taught by regular classroom teachers. (See chapter 4.) A total of 815 students from nine high schools across the United States completed a pretest questionnaire as part of this evaluation.[17] Two-thirds were in 10th grade, with 85.0 percent between 15 and 17 years old. Most were either African-American (57.6 percent) or Latino (25.3 percent). The students were almost evenly split among males (51.4 percent) and females (48.6 percent). Results are reported separately for males and females whenever a gender difference is statistically significant.

By their own report, these high school students live in an environment in which the threat of violence is a day-to-day reality. Consider these findings:

- Fully 9.3 percent of the students said that, within the last month, they had been physically attacked and hurt while at school. Of these, 59.2 percent, or 5.5 percent of the total sample, said they had been hurt badly enough to have seen a doctor.[18]

- More than half of the students reported that they had been in a physical fight with someone their own age during the past six months (males 61.0 percent, females 44.7 percent). Approximately 1 in 10 (males 12.0 percent, females 7.6 percent) said that they had been in a fight during the past week.

- Fully 38.7 percent of the students (males 45.7 percent, females 31.6 percent) said that, during the past week, they had been in a situation where they might have gotten into a fight. Most often, this incident involved a friend (23.9 percent), a family member (14.1 percent), or someone else they knew (30.3 percent). Males (17.1 percent) were more likely than females (7.1 percent) to report a situation involving a stranger.

- Adults were targets of aggression too: 13.7 percent of the students said that, during the past six months, they had hit a parent or guardian, and 12.9 percent said they had hit or pushed a teacher or other adult at school (males 17.9 percent, females 8.3 percent). It should be noted that, according to the National School Safety Center (NSSC), 5,200 U.S. teachers are attacked each month.[19]

This pervasive violence makes many students afraid, even at school. When asked if they had stayed home during the past month because someone might hurt or bother them at school, 6.4 percent of the students in the evaluation study said that they had, a figure roughly comparable to earlier surveys.[20] They have good reason to be afraid. Each month, says the NSSC, about 282,000 students are physically attacked in America's secondary schools.[21]

### *Readiness To Use Violence*

Feeding this dangerous climate is a readiness to use violence as a means of resolving interpersonal conflict. This readiness is reflected in the students' widespread agreement with attitude and belief statements that support the use of violence, as shown in figure 1.1. At the same time, when presented with statements that endorse nonviolence, a disturbing percentage of students chose to reject them, as shown in figure 1.2.

The survey also included a set of questions that asked students to say how a fictitious boy named Neil should respond to various conflicts involving other people. For each scenario, the students could choose from among five response alternatives, some of them violent or provocative, the others nonviolent.

Clearly, the majority of students chose a nonviolent alternative, but for too many of these students, violence was the option of first resort. To illustrate, consider this scenario: "A guy Neil hardly knows tells the principal that Neil has been

**Figure 1.1**

**Percentage of High School Students in Agreement With Attitude and Belief Statements That Support the Use of Violence**

| Attitude/Belief Statement | Percentage Agreeing[a] |
|---|---|
| If a girl sees someone flirting with her boyfriend, she should fight with her. | 81.4% |
| It's okay to hit someone who hits you first. | 73.9% |
| Sometimes it is necessary to fight with people who are rude or annoying. | 48.6%[b] |
| If I'm challenged, I'm going to fight. | 43.4%[c] |
| If someone steals from me, the best way to handle it is to beat the person up. | 25.6%[d] |

[a] Percentage of students indicating that they agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

[b] Males (55.0%), females (42.0%).

[c] Males (52.1%), females (35.0%).

[d] Males (38.1%), females (12.8%).

selling drugs at school." In response, 4.5 percent said that Neil should "threaten him for telling lies" (males 6.8 percent, females 2.4 percent), and another 10.5 percent said Neil should "beat the guy up" (males 14.1 percent, females 7.1 percent).

In another example, "One of Neil's friends puts moves on his girl." While two-thirds of the students said that Neil should talk to his friend, 7.0 percent said that he should do the same thing to his friend's girlfriend (males 9.8 percent, females 3.9 percent), and 8.9 percent said he should fight (males 12.6 percent, females 5.2 percent).

Some students seemed oblivious to the dangers of a violent response, even if the incident involved a stranger. For example, another scenario read as follows: "Someone Neil doesn't know insults his mother." In response, 15.3 percent said that Neil should return the insult in kind (males 20.8 percent, females 9.6 percent), and 13.8 percent said that Neil should fight (males 18.0 percent, females, 9.6 percent).

In a final example, "A stranger Neil's age bumps into him on the street." In response, 7.7 percent said that Neil should "push back" (males 11.0 percent, females 4.4 percent). Even though other options allowed for the possibility that the "bump" was unintentional, too many students seemed to interpret it as a deliberate provocation.

### *Prevalence of Weapons*

This widespread willingness to fight is made more dangerous by the prevalence of carrying weapons. As part of the same evaluation study, students were asked how often they had carried a hidden weapon (not counting a penknife) during the last six months. While 8.6 percent said they had done so once (males 10.1 percent, females 6.9 percent), fully 19.0 percent said they had done so more than once (males 28.0 percent, females 13.8 percent). When asked if they had carried a gun during the last six months, 8.8 percent of the students said they had done so once (males 14.1 percent, females 3.5

**Figure 1.2**

**Percentage of High School Students in Disagreement With Attitude and Belief Statements That Support the Use of Nonviolence**

| Attitude/Belief Statement | Percentage Disagreeing[a] |
|---|---|
| If someone called me a bad name, I would ignore them or walk away. | 37.8%[b] |
| I don't need to fight because there are other ways to deal with anger. | 20.9%[c] |
| When you are so mad that you want to hurt someone, it's always best to find another way to handle your anger. | 14.7%[d] |

[a]Percentage of students indicating that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

[b]Males (43.3%), females (32.2%).

[c]Males (26.9%), females (15.0%).

[d]Males (18.3%), females (11.1%).

percent), and 10.4 percent said they had done so more than once (males 15.9 percent, females 4.9 percent).

Similar findings emerged from a national survey conducted in 1990, which revealed that nearly 20 percent of all students in grades 9–12 reported they had carried a weapon at least once during the 30 days preceding the survey (CDC, 1991). Male students (31.5 percent) were more likely than female students (8.1 percent) to report having carried a weapon. Latino (41.1 percent) and African-American (39.4 percent) male students were more likely to report weapon carrying than were whites (28.6 percent). In general, knives or razors (55.2 percent) were carried more often than clubs (24.0 percent) or firearms (20.8 percent). Among African-Americans, however, those who carried a weapon most often carried a firearm (54.2 percent).[22]

Sustaining this life-threatening behavior is the illusion that carrying a weapon offers protection. For example, when asked if they would feel safer in a fight if they had a knife, 28.2 percent of the students (males 35.6 percent, females 20.5 percent) said they would.

### *Beliefs Supporting the Use of Violence*

The use of violence to resolve conflict is undergirded by a system of beliefs about aggression and its role in resolving conflict. Misinformation about the nature of violence abounds among the students who participated in the evaluation study, as displayed in figure 1.3, which shows the percentage of students who missed key items in a true-false test about interpersonal violence. Because of this misinformation, many of these students are not aware of the true risk factors for homicide and assault.

The bottom line, say many students, is that violence works. Just over one-fourth (25.9 percent) agreed with the statement, "I can gain more from fighting than I can lose." Males (32.9 percent) were much more likely to agree than females (18.4 percent). Part of what they can gain is a reputation, as revealed by the students' agreement with the following two statements:

- If I refuse to fight, my friends will think I'm afraid" (agreement: total [44.1 percent], males [49.3 percent], females [38.6 percent]).

- "If I walked away from a fight, I'd be a coward" (agreement: total [25.3 percent], males [28.1 percent], females [22.4 percent]).

To reject violence, say many of these students, is to invite attack. Over half agreed (males 59.7 percent, females 52.4 percent) that "anyone who avoids fighting is going to get picked on even more."

Many students see violence as inevitable, as something over which they have no control, as indicated by their agreement with the following statements:

- "Sometimes there's nothing you can do to stay out of a fight" (agreement: total [70.4 percent], males [74.1 percent], females [66.5 percent]).
- "No matter what I do, sometimes I will have to fight" (agreement: total [60.6 percent], males [65.8 percent], females [54.7 percent]).

Even when presented with statements that imply personal control over the violence in their lives, a sizeable number of students rejected them, as shown in figure 1.4.

Many of the study participants put the responsibility for avoiding violence on others rather than themselves. Over one-fourth (26.1 percent) agreed that "if you're getting into a fight, it's up to the other person to find a way out of it," and 36.5 percent agreed that "keeping out of fights depends on other people." Why is violence seen to be beyond personal control? One answer is the role of anger, an emotion that many students believe to be uncontrollable. Fully 42.7 percent of the students agreed that "when you're really angry, there's no way you can control yourself."

The evaluation study also revealed that a sizeable number of these high school students have difficulty with anger and its management. Nearly half (48.9 percent) admitted, "I lose my temper easily," and over one-fourth of the students (25.2 percent) disagreed with the statement: "I keep an even temper most of the time." Chronic anger is a problem for many of the students; 30.6 percent admitted that they "carry a lot of grudges."

Generally, there were few differences between males and females for this set of questions about anger, with the exception of questions that asked about becoming angry after

**Figure 1.3**

**Percentage of High School Students Giving Incorrect Responses to a True-False Test About Violence**

| Attitude/Belief Statement[a] | Percentage Answering Incorrectly |
|---|---|
| Half of all murder victims had alcohol in their bloodstream. (TRUE) | 50.5% |
| Most murders happen because of racial tension. (FALSE) | 38.0%[b] |
| More people are killed as a result of an argument than for any other reason. (TRUE) | 35.3%[c] |
| Women are murdered more often than men. (FALSE) | 34.5%[d] |
| In most murders, the killer and the victim know each other. (TRUE) | 31.6%[•] |

[a] The correct response is indicated in brackets.

[b] Males (34.0%), females (41.5%).

[c] Males (41.1%), females (29.7%).

[d] Males (29.6%), females (39.1%).

[•] Males (37.5%), females (25.8%).

**Figure 1.4**

**Percentage of High School Students in Disagreement With Attitude and Belief Statements That Imply Personal Control Over Violence**

| Attitude/Belief Statement | Percentage Disagreeing[a] |
|---|---|
| When I get into a fight, it's my own fault. | 78.1%[b] |
| If I mind my own business, I can stay out of fights. | 31.1%[c] |
| I am confident in my ability to stay out of fights. | 25.3%[d] |
| I can learn how to stay out of a fight. | 24.7% |
| If you want to, you can always find a way to keep from fighting. | 21.9%[e] |

[a] Percentage of students indicating that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

[b] Males (75.5%), females (80.7%).

[c] Males (36.4%), females (25.9%).

[d] Males (31.0%), females (19.8%).

[e] Males (27.7%), females (16.0%).

not getting one's way. For example, 44.8 percent of females agreed with the statement, "I get angry if I don't get my way," while only 32.8 percent of males did so.

## Introduction to the Report

To decrease the level of violence among the Nation's young people, we must address the mythology that supports this culture of violence, while also demonstrating the value of nonviolent approaches to conflict resolution. The challenge is clear: we must convince young people of the wisdom of nonviolence, even though many of them believe that their everyday experience tells them that violence works.

Several new prevention programs have been started during the past decade to meet this challenge.[23] Many of these programs focus on teaching anger management and conflict resolution skills to youth, some beginning as early as elementary school. Other programs seek to increase contact between youth and appropriate role models through sports and recreation, remedial education, and mentoring programs. Often, it is police and other criminal justice professionals who have taken the lead in developing these programs.

Clearly, to change the climate of violence that pervades the Nation's cities; to change the attitudes, beliefs, and expectations that feed that climate; and to teach young people how to resolve conflict peacefully, *all* elements of the community must be involved. This especially includes police and other criminal justice professionals.

This report reviews current school, community, and mass media strategies; describes the most promising programs now in operation; and offers recommendations for how police and other criminal justice professionals can get involved. By introducing the basic concepts and strategies of violence prevention, the report is designed to encourage even more criminal justice professionals to join this vital effort.

The programs described in this report provide an overview of the range of strategies now being used to combat youth

violence. Following a nationwide search to identify programs, six were selected for three-day site visits:

*School-Based Programs*

Second Step (Seattle, Washington)

Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (New York, New York)

Barron Assessment Counseling Center (Boston, Massachusetts)

*Community-Based Programs*

Five Point Violence Prevention Program (Columbia, South Carolina)

Violence Prevention Project (Boston, Massachusetts)

Youth at Risk Program (San Francisco, California)

Based on what was learned at these site visits, the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP), a comprehensive school-based program, and the Violence Prevention Project (VPP), a broad-based community project, were chosen for presentation. (Second Step and the Youth at Risk Program are described in appendix B and C, respectively.)

Selection of these two programs was influenced by several factors, including (1) the uniqueness and comprehensiveness of each program's approach, (2) its basis in theory, (3) its setting, and (4) the quality of its evaluation. The latter criterion was key, for, in general, the field of violence prevention suffers from a dearth of sound outcome evaluations.[24]

The report is organized as follows:

Chapter 2 presents a theoretical framework for understanding interpersonal violence. There is a broad consensus among social scientists that violence is a learned behavior, making it neither inevitable nor unavoidable. Programs focused on violence reduction must teach people new ways of channeling their anger into constructive, nonviolent responses to conflict.

Chapter 3 introduces school-based programs through New York City's Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP). RCCP is a school-based conflict resolution and mediation program jointly sponsored by the New York City Public Schools and Educators for Social Responsibility. Currently, this K–12 program is in place in 150 elementary, junior high, and high schools in the city, with 3,000 teachers and 70,000 students participating.

Chapter 4 introduces community-based programs through the Violence Prevention Project (VPP) in Boston. The VPP is an outreach and education project run by the city's Department of Health and Hospitals. Having completed a three-year pilot program, the project now has a citywide focus and is an integral part of the Mayor's Safe Neighborhood Plan. A key activity is teaching staff from community agencies that work with youth (such as multiservice centers, youth clubs, recreation programs, and churches) how to teach lessons from a high school violence prevention curriculum.

Chapter 5 describes current mass media strategies for violence prevention, most of which have been designed to increase public awareness of the problem and to support various community-based prevention programs. Public service announcements are only one option. Other ways to use the mass media include intensive station-sponsored campaigns, documentaries and other special programming, being a source to news reporters, and lobbying the entertainment community. Evidence is presented to refute the commonly held belief that, when it comes to entertainment, violence sells.

Chapter 6 offers recommendations for future program development, with a focus on how police and criminal justice professionals can join the violence prevention movement. The idea that criminal justice professionals should be involved in school, community, and mass media programs for violence prevention is consistent with contemporary notions of problem-oriented and community policing. There is much work to be done in the years ahead. By adopting a broad-based perspective on violence prevention, criminal justice professionals can assume a leadership position in this emerging field.

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# Chapter 2

# Understanding Violent Behavior

Beginning with the Surgeon General's Workshop on Violence and Public Health, which was convened by Dr. C. Everett Koop in October 1985,[1] and now with a sense of urgency that grows with each new headline, public health professionals have fully embraced the idea that violence is not just a criminal justice problem, but a public health problem as well.

The public health perspective, while serving to bring greater awareness to the problem of violence in U.S. society, has also contributed to the public's understanding of its causes and the broad range of strategies needed to prevent it.[2] Criminologists have collected, analyzed, and interpreted the data on violent crime.[3] The medical community, by applying a simple public health model to those data, has made a more modest but nonetheless vital contribution by putting the theoretical insights of criminologists into sharper focus.

Defining violence as a public health problem has also served to galvanize a debate on policy options, not just on how the criminal justice system can respond to violence to stop its recurrence, but on a full range of strategies for its prevention. As Rosenberg and Mercy state, "Defining homicide as a public health problem suggests that it is a concern to be addressed and remedied, not an inalterable fact of life."[4]

This chapter reviews the public health perspective on violence and theories of interpersonal aggression that have influenced the school, community, and media-based prevention programs described in this report. The public health perspective underscores the need for changing the social and economic conditions that breed violence, but while we work for long-term reforms that can address these conditions, there are other, more immediate steps we can take to protect youth.

## Homicide: A Profile

Influenced by mystery novels, television dramas, and the news media, the public normally thinks of homicide as either a premeditated crime or as the unfortunate consequence of a criminal act such as robbery.[5] In fact, in 1992 almost half of all murder victims were either related to (12 percent) or acquainted with (35 percent) their assailants. Only 14 percent of victims were known to have been murdered by a stranger, while the relationship between assailant and victim was unknown for an additional 39 percent.[6]

Most of these acquaintance murders are committed impulsively, in a moment of anger during an argument.[7] In 1992, 29 percent of all murders were determined to be the result of an argument.[8] That same year, firearms were used in 68 percent of all homicides, handguns in about 55 percent.[9] Alcohol use is another major factor; considered together, about half of all perpetrators or victims have consumed alcohol before the homicide.[10]

Gang involvement is an important aspect of the Nation's violence problem, but contrary to the impression created by the news media, such killings account for less than half of youth homicides. In Chicago, for example, from 1982 to 1989, gang killings accounted for 65 percent of the homicides among Hispanic youth ages 15–19, but only 48 percent among white youth and 34 percent among African-American youth.[11] Nationally, in 1992 only 809 murders were classified as juvenile gang killings, while the total number of murder victims ages 15–19 was 2,851.[12]

## The Public Health Perspective

The field of public health analyzes health problems in terms of the *host*, the *agent*, and the *environment*.[13] This perspective reminds us that violence is a complex behavior, with antecedents in biology, childhood experience, community norms, and social and economic conditions.

### *The Host*

A host is defined as someone whose behavior may determine or contribute to a public health problem. In the case of acquaintance violence, that person could be the violent perpetrator, the victim, or both. Many homicides, perhaps over one-fourth, are victim-precipitated, with the victim striking the first blow or showing a weapon.[14] As explained by one expert panel, in the case of interpersonal conflict leading to violence, "[T]he distinction between perpetrator and victim sometimes may have more to do with who is injured or killed than with who initiated the violence."[15]

Epidemiological data show that men are at greatest risk for assaultive violence, especially teens and young adults. For many young men, there is a preoccupation with machismo, a need to prove their manhood through toughness, aggressive posturing, even violence, especially when they are challenged by their peers.[16] Importantly, while verbal arguments are a precipitant in homicides for other racial and ethnic groups, they are an especially important factor for African-Americans.[17]

Among the strongest predictors of children's aggression is a history of physical abuse or harsh, erratic discipline by parents or other caretakers.[18] Thus, programs to improve parenting skills, especially among teenaged, single mothers, are a critical component of long-range efforts to reduce violence. Through such programs, parents learn how to manage their anger, how to solve conflicts with their children without resorting to violence, and how to use reinforcement of good behavior rather than physical punishment of bad behavior to discipline their children.[19] The key is a mix of warmth and nurturance with firmly enforced and well-defined limits.[20]

Additional perspective on the role of the "host" in interpersonal violence comes from psychological theories of aggression. Psychologists distinguish between two types of aggression, both involving the intent to cause harm, injury, or death to another person: (1) *affective aggression*, which is driven or at least accompanied by anger, and (2) *instrumental aggression*, which is not affect-driven but instead directed to achieving a desired goal.[21] Given its role in homicide statistics, most psychological studies have focused on affective (or anger-driven) aggression.

Geen has outlined a multistep model for understanding how affective aggression occurs in response to a threat or provocation.[22]

First, there is a stimulus, a change in the person's situation that creates a condition of stress and arousal to which aggression is one possible reaction. This stimulus is very often another person's behavior, but it can also be frustration, environmental stress, or physical pain.

Second, if the stimulus is another's behavior, the person judges whether that behavior was intentional and whether it violates social norms. If the action is judged to be arbitrary, malicious, and intentional, a high level of stress is experienced, which the person usually labels as anger.

Third, the person reviews available response options, including physical aggression, verbal aggression, withdrawal, and so forth. The person elects to respond aggressively if he expects it to result in removal of the threat or in other positive outcomes.

Geen's model also considers predisposing factors, including temperament, personality, past learning history, and social or cultural expectations. Family, peer, and mass media influences are especially important in creating a readiness to act aggressively.

Consistent with this model, adult violent offenders often showed certain characteristics as children: specifically, low empathic abilities, high levels of hyperactivity and impulsivity, attention deficit, and poor ability to delay gratification.[23] Their ability to exert impulse control is especially impaired under conditions of high emotional arousal and situational ambiguity.[24]

Highly aggressive children and violent adolescent offenders have also been found to define social problems in hostile ways, to adopt hostile goals in social interaction, to seek few facts before acting, to generate few alternative solutions when problem solving, and to anticipate few negative consequences for aggression. They tend to give high priority to aggressive solutions, believing that violence is legitimate, effective, and socially approved.[25]

With this research in mind, public health specialists have drawn four important conclusions about how to prevent youth violence.

First, it is essential to improve young people's perspective-taking skills. The research suggests that people are more likely to aggress if they see a threat or provocation as deliberate, malicious in intent, and avoidable. With improved skills, they will be open to alternative, less anger-provoking interpretations of other people's behavior. Tied to this is a need to adopt a reflective, rather than impulsive, style. Automatic, unthinking responses to provocation mean trouble.

Second, it is important to focus young people on the negative consequences of violence, not only for society as a whole, but for the person who contemplates taking aggressive action. In general, aggressive responses are inhibited when people are afraid to aggress or anticipate feelings of guilt.[26] As explained in chapter 4, when young people are asked to reflect on the costs and benefits of violence, they quickly come to realize that aggression brings great risks. What benefits there might be only come if one wins the fight.

Third, we must teach young people how to negotiate nonviolent solutions to conflict—solutions that meet both disputants' needs, including the need to save face. Clearly, more general problem-solving abilities come into play here. People are less likely to aggress if they have a range of response alternatives from which to choose. This means having the skill to execute these alternatives, as well as the expectation that they will lead to positive outcomes.

Fourth, we must teach young people to be vigilant for signs that a conflict might spin out of control. Fights usually go through a predictable sequence of steps before escalating to violence. The key is to recognize when this process is under way and to have the good sense to walk away if it cannot be defused.[27]

Geen summarizes the implications of his model of affective aggression as follows: ". . .by defining aggression as a reaction to situations, we can have some reason for hope that proper social measures may at least limit, if not remove altogether, the likelihood of violence."[28] A widely held misperception is that violence is an immutable part of human existence, a constant that we must endure rather than seek to change. The reality, and therefore the source of continued hope, is that violence is not inevitable.

### *The Agent*

A major contribution of the public health perspective is the renewed attention it brings to the weaponry of violence,[29] what public health specialists refer to as the *agent*.[30] The facts speak for themselves:

- Nearly 7 out of every 10 murders involve firearms.[31]
- Assaults among family members and acquaintances are three times more likely to result in death when a firearm is involved, compared to a knife or other cutting instrument.[32]
- The risk of death as a result of firearm injury is skyrocketing among the Nation's young people. In 1990, 4,200 American teenagers were killed by firearms. This represents the highest firearm death rate for 15–19 year-olds ever recorded in the United States.[33]

To deal with this aspect of the violence problem, there have been calls to restrict severely the sales of handguns and other firearms, even to ban ownership altogether.[34] Whether there is the political will to take such action and whether the ensuing legislation would meet constitutional requirements remain to be seen, but even if such restrictions were enacted, the enormous number of firearms already in circulation plus the likelihood of increased gun theft and black market activity preclude making much headway in reducing gun violence, at least in the short term.

This issue aside, there is, from a public health perspective, a clear need to minimize young people's ready access to such weapons.[35] As noted by Rosenberg and Mercy, "Although the question of restricting firearm ownership and usage is a contentious one in American society, few argue that adolescents should have unsupervised access to firearms or other lethal weapons."[36] Accordingly, *Healthy People 2000*,[37] which lists the U.S. Public Health Service's health objectives for the Nation, calls for a 20 percent reduction in the incidence of weapon carrying among adolescents ages 14–17.

Reducing youth access to firearms is partly a matter of better education. Research has shown that a significant proportion of gun owners disregard basic safety procedures by storing a loaded and easily accessed handgun in their home. This is true even among owners who have received training in the proper use of guns.[38] Reducing youth access is also a matter of stricter law enforcement against illicit gun trafficking and sales of handguns to juveniles.[39]

### *The Environment*

The *environment* in this context is defined as the broader social, cultural, institutional, and physical forces that contribute to a public health problem.[40] Criminologists and public health experts have identified several factors that create a social context that breeds violence.[41]

- Inadequate prenatal and pediatric health care.
- Poor-quality schools that fail to teach fundamental skills.
- Family disruption, which results in the absence of positive male role models.
- Rampant use of alcohol and other drugs.
- Illicit drug traffic.
- Widespread joblessness and lack of economic opportunities.
- Community disorganization and high rates of resident transience.
- An ideology common in some subcultures that encourages violence as a legitimate way to resolve disputes.

Many of these factors translate into an inability by families and communities to transmit positive values to young people, to communicate a sense of hope about the future, or to teach problem solving, communication, and nonviolent conflict resolution skills.[42]

Among the environmental factors receiving the greatest attention is media violence. There have been several public inquiries into the effects of viewing television violence, most recently by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS) Panel on the Understanding and Control of Violence and the American Psychological Association's (APA) Commission on Violence and Youth.[43] Unfortunately, these and other reviews of the research literature have done little to quell the fierce and highly politicized controversy over the meaning of this research.

Several studies show a positive correlation between television viewing and aggressive behavior. Critics of this literature have noted correctly that causation cannot be inferred from such data. One possible interpretation of these data is that television viewing is indeed a cause of violent behavior, but it is equally plausible that violence-prone people are more likely to select violent television programming.

Because of the weakness of these studies, longitudinal research involving cross-lagged correlational analysis are especially important. There are two major studies frequently cited in the research literature, one by Eron and his colleagues, which apparently found evidence in support of a causal hypothesis,[44] and the second by Milavsky and his colleagues, which did not.[45] Reviewers have drawn widely divergent conclusions about the meaning of this research.[46]

Hundreds of laboratory studies have also been done to explore the impact of television violence. In general, this research demonstrates that the observation of violence can (1) promote learning of new aggressive responses through observational learning and imitation, (2) provide information concerning whether or not aggression is a permissible or desirable response, and (3) lead to increased tolerance of aggression.[47]

While laboratory experiments allow causal relationships to be established, critics have rightly questioned the generalizability of this research, stating that such studies say nothing about the effects of actually televised entertainment programs on the aggressive behavior of children and adolescents in everyday life.[48] In response to this criticism, "natural" experiments have been conducted at summer camps or other residential settings where participants' exposure to violent television can be controlled, but, again, such studies have done little to resolve the central controversy about television violence as a possible cause of aggressive behavior.[49]

How all of this research should be interpreted will continue to be the subject of debate. In fact, most experts do believe that television violence has at least a small impact on aggressive behavior. Roberts and Maccoby state the case this way:

> . . . given the differences in samples, measures, stimuli, conditions and contingencies, it is difficult to ignore the fact that the overwhelming proportion of results point to a causal relationship between exposure to mass communication portrayals of violence and an increased probability that viewers will behave violently at some subsequent time.[50]

At the same time, however, a smaller, but no less resolute, group of experts continues to argue that the case is unproven.[51]

Still other experts acknowledge that television violence has an impact on aggressive behavior but question whether the effect is large enough to be important from a policy standpoint, especially in comparison to determining factors such as poverty and family environment.[52] Cook's assessment of 10 years ago still applies today: "[A]s a cause of aggression, television is almost certainly minor when compared to many of its other causes."[53]

## Implications for Prevention

A central goal of the U.S. criminal justice system is the prevention of crime and violence. Traditionally, criminal

justice professionals have pursued this goal through the arrest, conviction, and punishment of criminal offenders, both to incapacitate those individuals and to deter others from crime.

The enforcement of criminal codes is the cornerstone of a just and orderly society. It is apparent, however, that substantial reductions in crime and violence will come about only if police and other criminal justice professionals broaden their charge to include nontraditional crime prevention strategies and work in partnership with the communities they serve.

If we are truly committed to preventing violence, we must do more than rescue individual children from the dysfunctional environments in which they are growing up. We must also work to change those environments. One of the clearest lessons from the general field of public health is the value of environmental modification in reducing disease and injury.[54]

While we need a long-term plan of action for changing the social and economic conditions that breed violence, there are also more immediate steps we can take. As a position paper that emerged from the Third National Injury Control Conference stated, "Given the many potential points of opportunity for preventing violence, . . . coupled with the need for immediate action to reduce current levels of violent injuries and deaths, we need not—and should not—wait to take action until we have solved these large-scale social problems."[55]

The violence prevention programs reviewed in the following chapters are based on the premise that human aggression is a learned behavior, taught through example and reinforced by a culture that glamorizes violent responses to conflict. Conflict itself, with its roots in competition, poor communication, and miscalculation, is a normal part of life and cannot be eliminated. What must change, therefore, is how we respond to it. Accordingly, we must teach children that violence is not an acceptable means of handling their anger; we must teach them the futility of trying to insulate themselves from conflict by carrying weapons; and we must teach them the skills they need to resolve conflict nonviolently. Rosenberg and Mercy note that it is especially important to reach young people "before a pattern of victimization or interpersonal violence is established."[56]

These programs are also rooted in the belief that we must change the environment in which children live. In the case of the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program, described in chapter 3, there is an emphasis on school change—that is, on creating a safe school community in which children learn that they are expected to turn away from violence. In the case of the Boston Violence Prevention Project, described in chapter 4, there is an emphasis on fostering a communitywide focus on the problem of violence and the reinforcement of prosocial norms of behavior. In the case of the mass media strategies described in chapter 5, there is an emphasis on developing entertainment and news media that reinforce the anti-violence movement and prosocial norms of behavior.

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# Chapter 3

# School-Based Strategies:
## Resolving Conflict Creatively Program
## (New York, New York)

For Linda Lantieri, coordinator for New York City's Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP),[1] the spring of 1992 brought devastating news. Henry Rivera, a long-time RCCP teacher from Harlem's School for Career Development, was killed while trying to prevent a holdup at a Bronx laundromat. According to the news reports, the 71-year-old laundromat owner claimed that Rivera had saved his life. Those who knew this inspirational teacher were not surprised, for Rivera's entire career, indeed his entire life, had been committed to the cause of peace.

Lantieri worried that Rivera's death might lead his students to question the value of RCCP, if they concluded that the program's message of nonviolence, empowerment, and hope was no match for the ugly but routine violence that surrounded them. However, giving in to despair is not Lantieri's style. Although Rivera's death was a heart-rending reminder of how far RCCP must still go in changing the climate of violence that pervades New York City, Lantieri also remembers how far she and her colleagues have come in just a few years.

The Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP) is a school-based conflict resolution and mediation program jointly sponsored by the New York City Public Schools and Educators for Social Responsibility–Metro (ESR), a nonprofit organization dedicated to conflict resolution and multicultural education. Started in 1985, this grade K–12 program is now in place in 180 elementary, junior high, and high schools in New York City, with 3,000 teachers and 70,000 students participating.

RCCP's objectives include modeling nonviolent alternatives for dealing with conflict, teaching negotiation and other conflict resolution skills, and demonstrating to students that they can "play a powerful role in creating a more peaceful world." Nonviolent conflict resolution involves a complex set of skills that require guided instruction and practice to learn. Thus, the earlier in a child's life these lessons begin, the better.

RCCP is one of a growing number of violence prevention programs designed to teach students how to resolve conflict—what some educators now call the fourth *R*.[2] There is widespread agreement among public health experts that schools must be involved in violence prevention. Indeed, *Healthy People 2000*, the U.S. Public Health Service's blueprint for improving the Nation's health, urges that the proportion of elementary and secondary schools that teach nonviolent conflict resolution skills be increased to 50 percent or more.[3]

This chapter introduces school-based violence prevention programs through the example of the RCCP. This program is widely regarded by public health experts as among the best because of the comprehensiveness of its approach, which includes elementary, secondary, and special education curricula, a student-led mediation program, a parents' program, and an administrators' component.[4] It is also one of the few

school programs that has been formally evaluated.[5] Another noteworthy school-based program, the Second Step curriculum developed by the Committee for Children in Seattle, is described in appendix B.

How police and other criminal justice professionals can be involved in school-based violence prevention work is described in chapter 6.

## RCCP Program Philosophy

### *The Nature of Conflict*

RCCP is based on the premise that human aggression is a learned behavior, taught through example and reinforced by a culture that glamorizes violent responses to conflict. Conflict itself, with its roots in competition, poor communication, and miscalculation, is a normal part of life and cannot be eliminated. What must change, therefore, is how we respond to it. Accordingly, we must teach children that violence is not an acceptable means of resolving conflict, and we must teach them the skills they need to handle conflict nonviolently. Linda Lantieri states, "We need to demonstrate that the highest form of heroism is a search for creative, nonviolent solutions."[6]

A frequent misconception is that RCCP teaches kids to deal with conflict passively, to walk away from it. Clearly, there are times when walking away is necessary to escape physical danger. In general, however, avoidance is not the answer. In most cases, conflict should be dealt with head-on, with a focus on constructive problem solving. At the same time, RCCP recognizes that not all conflict can be resolved. In some cases, force, even physical force, must be used, but only after all other means of dealing with the underlying problem have been exhausted. RCCP students are taught that conflict can lead to violence but that it does not have to do so inevitably.

### *A Focus on School Change*

What most distinguishes RCCP from other primary prevention programs is its focus on creating school change, a mission consistent with the philosophy of Educators for Social Responsibility–Metro, which states that conflict resolution "is best taught in the context of a caring community characterized by cooperation, effective communication, emotional strength, appreciation of differences, recognition of common purposes, and shared decision making."

For this reason, RCCP's leadership argues that their program requires a buy-in at the highest levels within the school system. In contrast, competing programs are sold to individual schools, but this means that they fail to become institutionalized and must survive greater budget uncertainty. Ideally, the district superintendent will make RCCP part of the district's vision for school change. Once this happens, RCCP will then approach individual principals and teachers about joining the program. Participation at every level is voluntary; school districts, school principals, individual teachers, and parents take part because they choose to do so.

By creating a "peaceable school," a safe environment where students are encouraged to experiment with peaceful ways of resolving conflict, RCCP teachers strive to give their students a new image of what their world can be.[7] For this to happen, however, the teachers themselves must change. They must learn and then apply a new set of skills for heading off and resolving conflict. Even more difficult, they must adopt a new style of classroom management, one that fundamentally involves a sharing of power with students so that they can learn how to deal with their own disputes.

To create this change, RCCP has instituted an intensive program of teacher education. It goes beyond formal training on the RCCP curriculum to include a series of 6 to 10 classroom visits per year, one-on-one consultations, and after-school meetings with RCCP staff. This concentration on teachers' professional development is one of the program's greatest strengths.

### *A Focus on Appreciating Diversity*

Sometimes the conflict that results in violence has its roots in racism and prejudice. Educators must take this problem seriously, for they must not only prepare young people for the world of work, but also for getting along in a pluralistic society.

RCCP also seeks to abate racism and other causes of violence through lessons on "multicultural appreciation" and "bias awareness." Teachers help their students become aware of their prejudices and to see that stereotypes are based on inaccurate or incomplete information. Differences among people are acknowledged, but RCCP urges that they be seen as a cause for celebration rather than as an excuse for prejudice.

Most important, RCCP seeks to foster a classroom climate in which students are affirmed and respected for who they are. RCCP staff work with teachers to create what they call a

multicultural classroom, where teachers make a special point of identifying and celebrating the different racial and ethnic heritages of their students. In such a classroom, expressions of racial or ethnic bias are not tolerated. Teachers stay alert for spontaneous comments or actions that seem motivated by bias, which provides opportunities for teaching about the workings of prejudice.

### *The Need for a Long-Term Commitment*

RCCP is not a quick fix for the problem of interpersonal violence. According to RCCP's directors, changing the way in which people respond to conflict will require a long-term commitment:

> We've learned that it takes time for adults to integrate conflict resolution concepts into their own lives; it takes time for them to learn how to translate those concepts into the classroom; and it takes time for even the most effective classroom instruction to have a significant impact.[8]

Indeed, RCCP staff have observed that it often takes months to see a change in students' behavior. The lessons of a lifetime, even one as short as a child's, cannot be unlearned overnight.

## Conflict Resolution Curriculum

> Mark, a fifth-grader, talked to his RCCP classmates about how angry he was with his brother a few weeks ago, so angry that he hit him. "You hit your brother?" a shocked classmate asked. "Yes," Mark replied, "but that was before we got to the chapter called 'Dealing Appropriately With Anger.'" "Oh, that's different," the classmate agreed.[9]

RCCP has developed and tested several school-based curriculums focused on violence prevention and conflict resolution. Two of these are described below: one for elementary school students, the other for secondary students.

RCCP's curriculums share two important features. First, they concentrate on several component skills: active listening, assertiveness (as opposed to aggressiveness or passivity), expressing feelings, perspective taking, cooperation, negotiation, and how to interrupt expressions of bias. Without proficiency in these skills, RCCP argues, students will be ill equipped to find peaceful solutions to conflict. Learning these skills requires weekly practice, so teachers are encouraged to do at least one "peace lesson" a week, to use "teachable moments" that arise because of events in the classroom or the world at large, and to "infuse" conflict resolution lessons into the regular academic program.

Second, the lessons are built around role-playing, interviewing, group dialogue, brainstorming, and other experiential learning strategies, all of which require a high degree of student participation and interaction. Use of the curriculum requires teachers to relinquish some control over what happens in their classroom. Because many teachers are uncomfortable with this, at least at first, RCCP provides continuing consultation and support during the school year, as described below.

These curriculums require highly developed verbal skills, so several adjustments are necessary to accommodate the variety of cognitive and communications abilities of special needs students. With that in mind, a new RCCP curriculum for special needs students breaks the lessons into smaller steps and makes greater use of visual and kinesthetic learning modalities (such as art, mime, and nonverbal communication).

### *Elementary School Curriculum*

RCCP's newly revised elementary school curriculum is built around 51 lessons called workshops, a term that calls attention to the fact that the teacher acts as a facilitator, leading students through a series of experiential learning activities. Each lesson has the same structure: (1) warm-up exercise ("gathering"), (2) review of the class agenda, (3) workshop activities, (4) student evaluation of the workshop, and (5) closing activity. The curriculum, which is divided into 12 units, presents separate lessons for grades K–3 and 4–6.

*Unit 1: Setting the stage.* The first unit helps build a classroom environment of mutual caring and respect, where all members are included and valued. Individual workshops focus on group rules for speaking and listening, the components of good listening skills, the impact of put-downs and "put-ups" on self-esteem, and accepting differences of opinion.

*Unit 2: Peace and conflict.* In the second unit, the curriculum helps children see that they, like all of us, "have the power and responsibility to be peacemakers." The unit begins by introducing key concepts. Peace is a dynamic time of action, accomplishment, and close human relationships. Conflict is a natural part of everyone's life and can be either constructive or destructive, depending on how it is handled. For grades K–3, this unit concludes with students completing a "peace pledge," which describes and illustrates a specific

and realistic step that they can take every day to help create peace (figure 3.1).

*Unit 3: Communication.* The third unit teaches students that good communication is the key to both preventing and resolving conflict. Workshops focus on the basic steps of the communication process, the role of misunderstandings in creating conflict, and the importance of understanding another person's point of view. The last workshop in this unit introduces the skill of active listening, which entails several techniques: asking questions, reflecting the speaker's feelings, paraphrasing what the speaker says, and showing understanding for another's perspective.

*Unit 4: Affirmation.* This unit features classroom activities that remind students of their own good qualities and help them appreciate and acknowledge those qualities in others. For example, students in grades K–3 create a book about themselves, with an illustrated cover and various "affirmation pages" that depict a game they are good at, something they do to help another person, and so on. For one of the workshops, students in grades 4–6 use a structured interview to decide what the perfect gift would be for a classmate.

*Unit 5: Cooperation.* The fifth unit introduces the concepts and skills of cooperation through a set of experiential activities. In one workshop, for example, K–3 students work in small groups to create an imaginary monster, while those in grades 4–6 work in groups to create a pantomime of some type of machine, such as a clothes dryer. Students learn that working cooperatively toward a common purpose can reduce the opportunities for conflict and that if a conflict does arise, a history of cooperation can facilitate the search for a win-win resolution.

*Unit 6: Acknowledging feelings.* The sixth unit introduces two important skills in conflict resolution: (1) recognizing one's own feelings and telling others about them, and (2) acknowledging, accepting, and empathizing with the feelings of others. Feelings of anger are a special focus. Typical responses to feelings of anger—aggression and avoidance—are sometimes the only choice people have, but, unfortunately, these feelings do nothing to resolve the underlying conflict.

Being assertive—that is, standing up for oneself without hurting the other person—is presented as a constructive

**Figure 3.1: Student Peace Pledges—Provided by RCCP.**

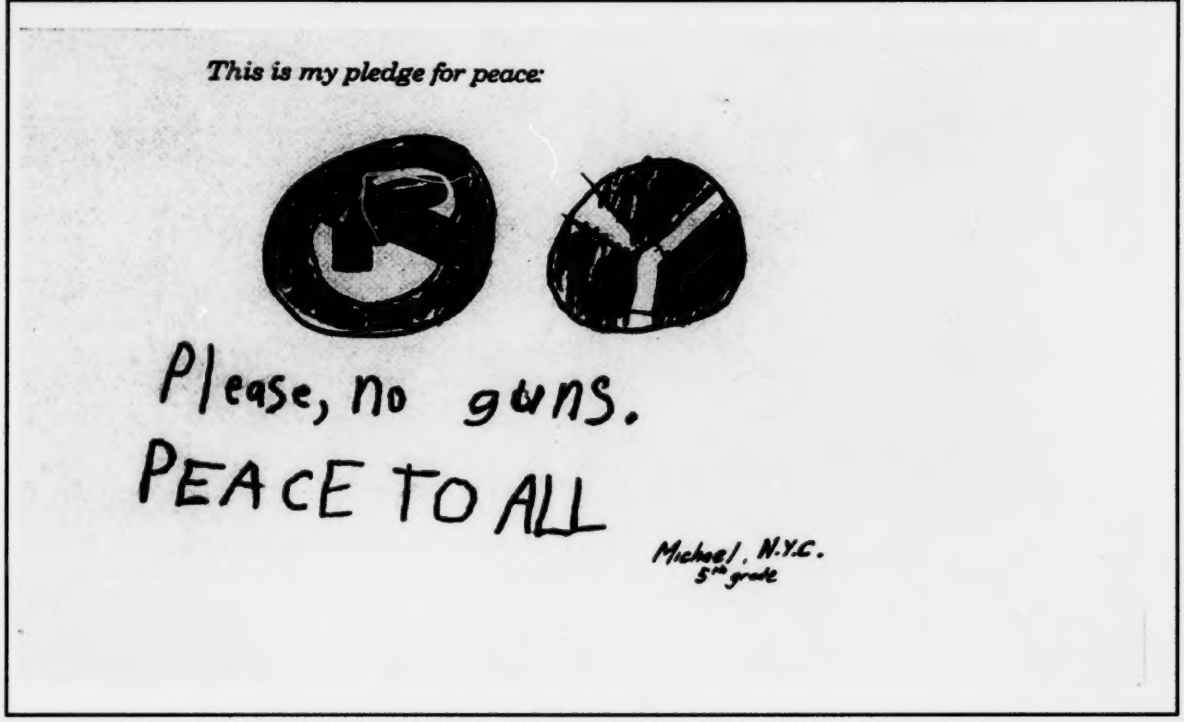
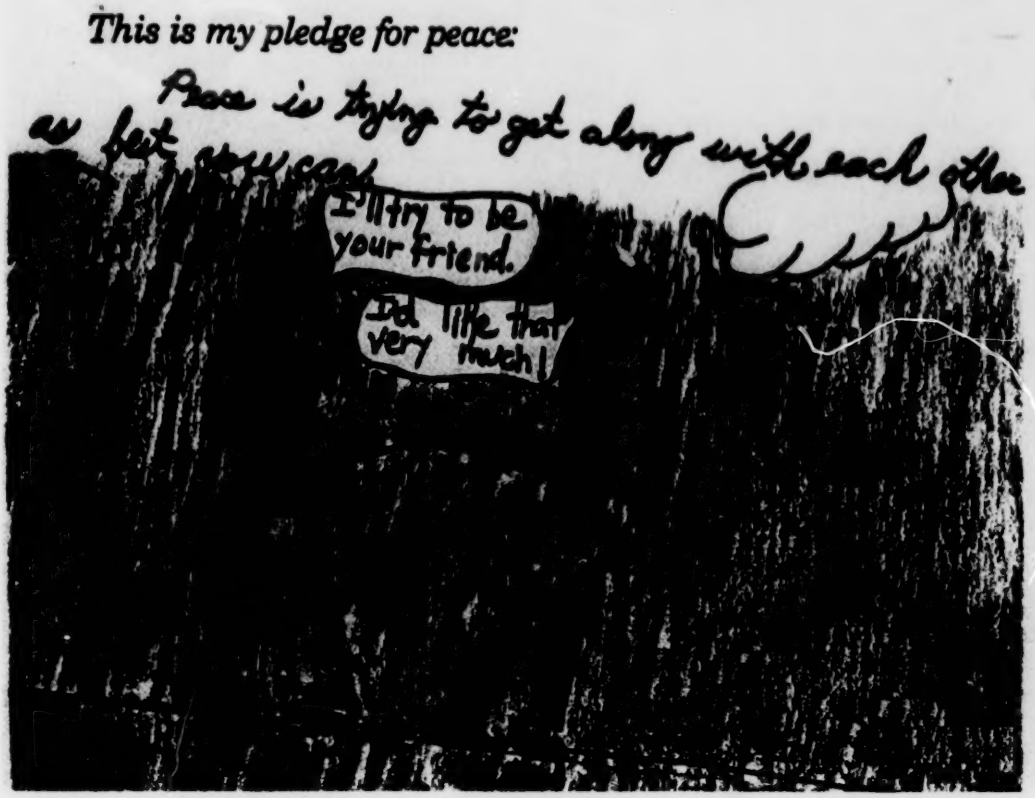


**Figure 3.1 (Continued): Student Peace Pledges**—Provided by RCCP.


This is my pledge for peace:
Peace is trying to get along with each other
as best we can.
I'll try to be your friend.
I'd like that very much!

alternative. Students in grades 4–6 learn how to use "I messages," a method for communicating feelings and thoughts that avoids criticizing or blaming others (for example, "I feel angry when you don't listen because it makes me think that what I am saying is not important to you").

*Unit 7: Resolving conflict creatively.* In the seventh unit, students learn specific skills needed for a problem-solving approach to conflict (figure 3.2). Workshops for grades 4–6 focus on the techniques of win-win negotiation and mediation, both of which involve active listening, "I messages," and creative questioning. Workshops for grades K–3 lay the groundwork for teaching negotiation and mediation skills when the students are older. In all grades, the workshops are structured to let students practice these new skills and get constructive feedback.

*Unit 8: Appreciating diversity.* This unit is the first of a three-unit sequence of lessons that focuses on issues of diversity and prejudice. It begins with students exploring the attributes they have in common with others in the class and those that are different. Students in grades 3–6 discover that even superficially similar objects, such as pieces of fruit or peanuts, are not uniform. Difference is a constant in nature.

From this generalization, the unit moves on to explore differences among people in more depth. Students in grades K–2 look at the different kinds of games people play and differences in family composition. Students in grades 3–6 list similarities and differences among people and discuss both what is good and what is difficult about such differences.

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## Figure 3.2

## Hints for De-Escalating a Conflict

1. Take a deep breath to stay relaxed.
2. Look the other person in the eye, with both of you sitting or standing.
3. Speak softly and slowly.
4. Keep your legs and arms uncrossed. Do not clench your fists or purse your lips.
5. Keep reminding yourself, "We *can* find a win-win resolution to this." Remind the other person of this, too.
6. If necessary, ask for a break to collect your thoughts or release pent-up tension.
7. Give "I messages."
8. Paraphrase what the other person has said, asking for clarification as necessary.
9. Watch your language. Words that escalate a conflict are *never, always, unless, can't, won't, don't, should,* and *shouldn't.* Words that de-escalate a conflict are *maybe, perhaps, sometimes, what if, it seems like, I feel, I think,* and *I wonder.*
10. Really listen to what the other person is saying, with the goal of truly understanding that person's point of view.
11. Affirm and acknowledge the other person's position.
12. Ask questions that encourage the other person to look for a solution. Ask open-ended questions rather than ones that will evoke a yes or no response.
13. Keep looking for alternative ideas to resolve your dispute so that both of you have your needs met.

*Unit 9: Bias awareness.* The ninth unit provides students with a conceptual framework for understanding the difference between preference and prejudice. Students in grades K–2 begin a book called *It Isn't Fair!* in which they describe injustices related to prejudice. Students in grades 3–6 start out with a simulation game in which treats are arbitrarily distributed, with some students getting more than others. They then use their problem-solving skills to search for a more equitable distribution system.

*Unit 10: Countering bias.* The tenth unit, students investigate ways in which they can intervene to stop discriminatory behavior. Through role-plays, the students explore how prejudice and discrimination present themselves in their lives. They practice developing and using active listening, "I messages," and other strategies for countering acts of discrimination by others.

*Unit 11: Peacemakers.* The peacemakers unit celebrates people currently working for peace as well as those who have made important contributions in the past. For example, students in grades 3–6 identify characters they admire in books, television, and movies and discuss to what extent these characters exhibit the attributes of peacemakers. In another lesson, they identify several organizations that work for peace and describe their activities.

*Unit 12: The future—A positive vision.* The last unit focuses on discussing students' concerns about the future, investigating controversial issues, and envisioning a promising future in which the students will play an active role. In one activity, students read aloud and discuss Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. They then make lists of their dreams for the future and create images of themselves making a better world.

*Secondary School Curriculum*

This curriculum covers material similar to that of the elementary school curriculum but with an additional focus on ways of de-escalating volatile situations that might lead to violent confrontations. The lessons are divided into three major units.

*Unit 1: Engaging the students.* The lessons in the first unit introduce norms for classroom conduct that will promote an atmosphere of mutual respect. The lessons also review the concept of negotiation and help students see the relevance of conflict resolution in their daily lives.

*Unit 2: Concepts and skills of conflict resolution.* Using simulations and role-plays, this unit covers a wide range of topics: the vocabulary of conflict resolution; messages received from parents, friends, and the media about conflict; the rules of fair fighting; and basic skills essential to successful negotiation, including active listening, perspective taking, the use of "I messages," and brainstorming. This unit also helps students understand how differences in point of view affect people's interpretations of a conflict situation, the importance of cooling-off periods, and the need to move beyond stated positions to the disputants' underlying needs.

*Unit 3: Concepts and skills of intergroup relations and bias awareness.* Students explore commonalities and differences between their family's values and those of their classmates' families. Several basic concepts are introduced, including stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. Students reflect on their own experiences, especially how they have been hurt and how they have hurt others. They then consider what they can do as individuals to resist prejudice and discrimination, such as interrupting racially biased statements by others.

## Professional Training

> During a faculty meeting, the principal turned to Mrs. Baker, who had participated the previous year in RCCP. "Could you give us an idea of how you benefitted from being part of RCCP last year?" he asked. "Oh, it's very simple," she responded. "It saved my marriage."

RCCP uses both formal training sessions and one-on-one work to teach regular classroom teachers how to present the conflict resolution curriculum. Equally important, the teachers are led to reexamine how they handle conflict in their own lives, particularly in their relationships with students. With a strong commitment from the principal to make the school violence-free and with changes in the teachers' style of classroom management, students are provided a safe environment in which to work on their emerging conflict resolution skills.

RCCP instructors provide 20 hours of introductory training in a series of after-school sessions for 30 to 40 teachers. Normally, these sessions are organized at the school district level. The training presents the RCCP philosophy and the curriculum; teaches communication, conflict resolution, and intergroup relations skills; and demonstrates "infusion" strategies for integrating these concepts and skills into social studies, language arts, and other academic subjects.

Training also covers teaching techniques, in particular the use of role-playing, interviewing, group dialogue, brainstorming, and other experiential approaches. Teachers have to keep in mind that, in some cultures, being assertive is not commonly accepted behavior, especially among children.

The teachers are also encouraged to utilize cooperative learning groups, assigning teams of students to study, work on projects, and learn together. Such teams can be used to provide diverse groups of students with a common purpose, which can lead to new friendships and a reduction of prejudice.

To date, RCCP has trained more than 3,000 school teachers, including 1,000 given introductory training during the 1992–1993 school year. The training is well received. An evaluation conducted during the 1988–1989 school year showed that 88 percent of the trainees rated the sessions as very good or excellent.

A key to RCCP's success is the follow-up support that teachers receive as they begin using the curriculum. Each new teacher is assigned to an RCCP staff developer, who visits between 6 and 10 times a year, giving demonstration lessons,[10] helping the teacher prepare, observing classes, giving feedback, and sustaining the teacher's motivation. In addition, the staff developer convenes bimonthly follow-up meetings after school so that the teachers can receive additional training, share their experiences, discuss concerns, and plan schoolwide events. During a teacher's second year, the staff developer visits only two or three times.

RCCP trains school administrators too. First, RCCP sponsors workshops to introduce school principals to the program and the philosophy of nonviolent conflict resolution. Second, RCCP supports the Board of Education's SBM/SDM program (School-Based Management/Shared Decision Making) through an Institute on Conflict Resolution and Intergroup Relations for school district personnel. Through the Insti-



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tute, RCCP urges that team building, consensus decision making, and the philosophy of conflict resolution be made a cornerstone of school reform.

## Student Mediation Program

> When Yvette showed up at Sandra's apartment building one Saturday with a knife and several friends to back her up, it was clear that the conflict between them had spun out of control. Word of the incident spread quickly, and on Monday two of the high school's RCCP-trained peer mediators intervened. After a two-hour session, the girls worked through their problem, which they learned was due to a misunderstanding that had been deliberately created by a mutual "friend."

The student mediation program, a key component of RCCP's plan for school change, provides strong peer models for nonviolent conflict resolution and reinforces students' emerging skills in working out their problems. Ultimately, by reducing the number of fights between students, it can contribute to a more peaceful school climate. Student mediation is not a substitute for an effective school discipline policy, for if strictly enforced sanctions against fighting are not in place, students are unlikely to turn to the mediators for help.

RCCP embraces the concept of "principled negotiation" outlined by Fisher and Ury in their best-seller, *Getting to Yes*. With this approach, mediation is not a contest of wills to see whose position will prevail but an opportunity for mutual problem solving. In this view, the ultimate goal of mediation is not to force one of the parties to give up something or to find a way of "splitting the difference" but to forge a win-win solution that meets the underlying interests and needs of both parties.[11] Figure 3.3 lists the steps used by RCCP's student mediators.

RCCP initiates this program only in schools that have participated in RCCP for a year or more and have at least a small group of teachers who regularly use the curriculum. An RCCP manual, *Implementing Student Mediation Programs in Elementary Schools*, is designed to help school officials decide whether a mediation program can work in their school and, if so, how that can be set up and maintained. The classroom work provides a base of knowledge and support for nonviolent conflict resolution. As explained by ESR, "School mediation programs are best implemented as part of a larger effort to train staff and students in conflict resolution." This is a significant strength over mediation-only projects elsewhere in the country.

Adopting this approach means that teachers and school administrators must give up some control, for with mediation, solutions are suggested but never imposed. For that reason, new programs sometimes meet resistance from faculty who are concerned about students' being able to handle the responsibility. However, according to RCCP staff, once these teachers see the program in action, they are won over.

Although the mediation program is an important part of RCCP's approach, funding limitations have prevented its widespread implementation. RCCP estimates an average cost of $10,000 per year to run a school mediation program, which covers training of faculty coordinators, faculty time for supervision and support, ongoing consultation by RCCP staff, and various supplies, including T-shirts for mediators. During the 1992–1993 school year, RCCP added mediation programs in four additional schools, bringing the total to one secondary school and 13 elementary school programs.

### *The Mediation Program in Action*

In elementary schools, the mediators are on duty during the lunchtime recess, easily identified by the mediator T-shirts they wear over their regular clothes. Working in pairs, the mediators are vigilant for any fights that break out. They approach the disputants and ask if they want mediation. If the students consent—and most do—the mediators take them to a quiet area of the playground to talk.

The mediators do not try to break up physical fights. That is left to the teacher or parent supervisor on duty, who can then decide whether the disputants would benefit from working with a team of mediators. No referral is made if the fight is dangerous or if it seems to involve emotional issues beyond the mediators' skills.

In secondary schools, the mediators work in pairs, acting on referrals they receive from faculty or students. Mediations are typically conducted during lunch hours in a room set aside for that purpose. On occasion, however, mediators are called out of class to conduct a session that cannot be postponed.

Each school has a faculty coordinator who monitors the program, conducts biweekly meetings, and gives advice and feedback to the mediators. The coordinators receive two days of training, with the primary emphasis on coached practice in mediation. Some elementary programs also hire parents to supervise the playgrounds during lunch hours, which costs approximately $100 per week (two hours per day, five days a week, at $10 per hour).

When the mediation program is implemented, the faculty coordinator must play an active role in educating everyone

## Figure 3.3

## RCCP Student Mediation Program: Steps for a Successful Mediation

**Introduction**

1. Introduce yourselves as mediators.
2. Ask those in the conflict whether they would like a mediator to help solve the problem.
3. Find a quiet area near the playground or lunchroom where the mediation can be held away from other students.
4. Ask for agreement to the following rules: *(a)* They will try to solve the problem. *(b)* There will be no name-calling. *(c)* They will take turns talking without interrupting.
5. Pledge to keep everything they say confidential.

**Listening**

6. Ask the first person what happened. Paraphrase.
7. Ask the first person how he or she feels. Reflect those feelings.
8. Ask the second person what happened. Paraphrase.
9. Ask the second person how she or he feels. Relect those feelings.

**Looking for Solutions**

10. Ask the first person what he or she could have done differently. Paraphrase.
11. Ask the second person what she or he could have done differently. Paraphrase.
12. Ask the first person what he or she can do right now to help solve the problem. Paraphrase.
13. Ask the second person what she or he can do right now. Paraphrase.
14. Use creative questioning to bring the disputants closer to a solution.

**Finding a Resolution**

*Note*: A good resolution is one that solves the problem, perhaps for good. It is specific, answering questions of who, where, when, and how. It is balanced, with both disputants having the responsibility to make it work.

15. Help both disputants find a solution they feel good about. (As a last resort, the mediator can offer solutions for the disputants to consider, but this is not preferred.)
16. Repeat the solution and all of its parts, and ask if each disputant agrees to it.
17. Congratulate both students on a successful mediation.
18. Fill out the mediation report form.

about the program and encouraging referrals. Indeed, most of the early referrals come from the coordinator. As the program grows in acceptance, other faculty and staff will begin making referrals; the mediators will feel comfortable approaching disputants to ask if they want help; and the disputants themselves will seek out mediation.

School administrators must support the program, which they can do in several ways: incorporating mediation into the school discipline code, making referrals, promoting the program through letters and meetings, arranging presentations to the faculty and student body, and providing time and space for the faculty coordinator to work.

### *Mediator Selection and Training*

To launch a new program, RCCP initially trains 25 to 35 student mediators. With four mediators assigned each day, and with each mediator on duty one day per week, this number allows full coverage for one lunch period, taking into account absenteeism and attrition. Later, as the program matures, other mediators can be trained to cover additional lunch periods.

Schools have established various procedures for selecting the mediators. In some schools, for example, students nominate their classmates by secret ballot, and teachers pick from among the top vote-getters. In others, interested students complete an application form.

All of the methods used for selecting mediators have three principles in common: (1) there is student involvement; (2) there is school staff involvement; and (3) the mediators are selected to represent a cross-section of the student body, defined by gender, race, class, achievement level, and placement (for example, special education).

The mediators include a mix of "negative" and "positive" student leaders. One of the primary outcomes of the program is to increase the mediators' self-esteem. The hope is that carefully selected at-risk youth will be moved through their involvement in the program to turn their leadership talents to constructive purposes. An evaluation of the mediation program (see the section of this chapter called "Evaluation") shows that this hope is being realized.

With established programs, being a mediator is a highly coveted honor. As a student from P.S. 321 explained, "I was at a birthday party and saw a mediator help stop a fight, and I wanted to be able to do that." To avoid bad feelings among those not selected, the RCCP program in Anchorage created a Peacemakers Club to involve students in schoolwide "peace projects," such as making posters, visiting nursing homes, and so forth.

The mediator training is rigorous, lasting three full days. Being a mediator is a tough job and requires mastery of several complex skills: active listening, reflecting feelings, paraphrasing each disputant's position, and asking creative questions to help the parties forge a mutually agreeable solution. Also critical is the ability to recognize what the parties agree on and what remains to be settled, and to differentiate between what the parties say they want and what their underlying needs are. Through all this, the mediators have to avoid taking sides, even if one of the parties seems especially upset and even if one of the parties is a friend.

To become certified, the mediators must demonstrate their new skills in a role-played conflict, showing both a working knowledge of the mediation process and an ability to improvise. They also must pledge to use their new skills to solve their own problems instead of getting into fights. The mediators then receive a certificate at a special graduation ceremony, which can be held at either a school assembly or a private function with friends and relatives. The elementary school students also receive their mediator T-shirt.

Mediators can get frustrated when they first try out their skills. This is especially true with new programs, since the student body is still learning what the process of mediation is about. Even after a program gets established, new mediators will run into problems. Some of them get teased at first, either because of jealousy or because classmates mistakenly see the mediators as judges or enforcers rather than helpers. In other cases, friends will expect the mediator to stick up for them rather than being an impartial facilitator. Other problems just come with the territory. Disputants might say they will abide by the rules but then fail to do so. Strong emotions might get expressed that make the new mediator uncomfortable. In other cases, the parties might have trouble opening up and must be drawn out.

Because becoming a good mediator requires practice, day-to-day coaching by the faculty coordinator is essential. There are also biweekly meetings to provide ongoing training, troubleshoot problems that have arisen, review difficult cases, maintain a sense of community among the mediators, and build up their morale.

At these meetings, the coordinator also reviews the mediators' written reports. If this review shows, for example, that many of the solutions are simplistic (for example, the disputants do nothing more than apologize to one another), the coordinator can give the mediators additional practice in

helping parties craft more constructive resolutions that deal with the heart of their dispute.

## Parent Training

> A student mediator talked about how her parents squabble, usually over silly things. "That's what was happening last Saturday, so I decided to use my skills," she explained. "So you listened to your parents?" an RCCP staff developer asked. "No, I actually had to do a formal mediation. I told them the rules, I paraphrased what each said, and they were able to come up with a solution they both could live with."

No one would disagree that parents and teachers should work together to teach children how to resolve conflict nonviolently. The reason is clear: if students are to use their emerging conflict resolution skills outside of school, they must have family support. The problem in bringing parents into the process is equally clear. It is not that parents actively resist a message of nonviolence, though some might do so. Rather, it is that parents who are busy making a living and raising a family have difficulty finding the time to be involved.

RCCP staff recently launched the Parent Involvement Program, which they piloted and are slowly expanding in Community School District 15 in Brooklyn, where RCCP began. With this program, a team of two or three parents per school is trained for 60 hours to lead workshops for other parents on intergroup relations, family communication, and conflict resolution. During the first year, 1990–1991, teams from 11 elementary schools subsequently led 20 workshops for other parents.[12] To date, nearly 300 parents have received training.

There are three workshops in the series, each lasting two hours. In the first, parents explore the messages they got about conflict when they were growing up, how they presently deal with conflict, and what aspects of their conflict management they would like to change. Moving from this discussion, the participants learn the basic principles of successful conflict resolution. The second workshop focuses on improving communication skills: active listening, paraphrasing, and so forth. The third and final workshop focuses on learning and practicing conflict resolution skills, with the hope that mediation skills will enable parents to intervene effectively when conflicts arise with their children.

As RCCP looks to the future, parent education will be a top priority. In the 1992–1993 school year, RCCP trained additional parents in District 15, offered refresher training to the existing group of workshop leaders, and hosted a districtwide conference for parents. RCCP also brought the parent education program to two additional school districts.

## Organization and Budget

Tom Roderick, ESR's Executive Director, and the New York City Public Schools' Linda Lantieri have codirected RCCP since its inception, taking equal responsibility for staff management and strategic planning.

Lantieri's office, residing in the Division of Student Support Services, takes the lead on site development, liaison with the schools, public education, and media relations. Key staff include the program coordinator (Lantieri, at 100 percent time), three teacher trainers (all full-time), an administrative assistant, and clerical staff.

ESR takes the lead in curriculum development, implementation of the mediation program, and teacher training and professional development. Key staff include the following:

- Executive director (Roderick, at 60 percent time).
- Deputy director (50 percent), who oversees the teacher and parent training programs.
- Assistant director (100 percent), who directs the conflict resolution program.
- Lead trainer (60 percent).
- Program administrator (80 percent).
- Business manager (80 percent).
- Administrative assistant (50 percent).
- Staff developers (variable part-time).

The staff developers are the linchpin of the RCCP program. ESR oversees a large number of part-time staff developers who work one-on-one with anywhere between 1 and 10 teachers, depending on their time commitment. The staff developers have a diversity of professional backgrounds. What they share is rigorous training on how to implement the curriculum and how to work in the schools.

Expansion of the New York City program is making it necessary for ESR to add several so-called area specialists, each of whom

will be responsible for coordinating the program in a defined set of participating schools. Promoted from the ranks of staff developers, the area specialists will work with a team of five to eight staff developers assigned to their area, helping orient them to their schools, providing ongoing support and assistance, and building a supportive peer network among the team members. They will also recruit new schools, conduct orientation sessions, participate in teacher training, and serve as a liaison with RCCP's leadership.

The private-public partnership between ESR and the New York City Public Schools is an important ingredient in RCCP's success. Because the funding sources are diversified, with ESR bringing in money from foundations and other private sources, the Board of Education cannot as easily sidetrack the staff into tangential activities or pressure them to undertake unmanageable expansion. At the same time, this organizational structure has made it possible for the program to gain easier entry into the schools. RCCP encourages replicators to copy this private-public partnership. Two such programs, one in New Orleans and the Vista Unified School District in Southern California, have followed the New York program's lead.

RCCP's total budget for the 1992–1993 school year is about $2 million. The Board of Education is directly responsible for $700,000, which covers staff salaries and teacher stipends to attend training. ESR is responsible for $1.3 million, with $750,000 derived from contracts with the city's individual school districts and $550,000 raised from private sources. These private funds are essential. They enable RCCP to provide intensive and personalized services to teachers, to support curriculum development and other program innovation, and to protect the program's integrity during times of fiscal uncertainty.

RCCP annually costs just over $33 per student, including staff salaries and training stipends. To educators accustomed to buying packaged curriculums that sell for a few hundred dollars, this might seem expensive. RCCP notes, however, that the cost of a high school metal detector, with the personnel needed to operate it, costs approximately $100,000 per year. It should be remembered, however, that RCCP is much more than a curriculum. It is an intensive program of school change, with a strong emphasis on teacher training and professional development. For this reason, as noted before, RCCP requires a buy-in at the highest levels within the school system before individual principals and teachers are approached.

## Evaluation

Metis Associates, Inc., an independent evaluator, assessed the RCCP program in Brooklyn's Community School District 15 during the 1987–1988 school year. Data were obtained from teacher questionnaires, interviews with teachers and administrators, and student achievement tests administered to 190 fourth- and fifth-graders who were either in the program or in a matched control group.

Of the 60 teachers who participated in RCCP that year, 53 completed the questionnaire. Enthusiasm for RCCP was high. More than 90 percent rated the overall implementation of the program as very good or excellent. About three-fourths of the teachers said they were spending 10 or more periods per month teaching specific lessons in conflict resolution, while 96 percent said they were infusing RCCP concepts into their regular academic curriculum.

Fully 87 percent of the teachers said that RCCP was having a positive impact on their students, a view also expressed during the in-depth interviews. One teacher had this to say about the curriculum:

> It's taught [my students] that there are other ways to resolve their conflicts besides fighting and being nasty. It's showed them how to cooperate, what friendship really means, and the value of working together as a group to achieve common goals.

The achievement test results confirmed this view, showing that most RCCP students had learned the key concepts of conflict resolution and were able to apply them when responding to hypothetical conflicts.

A subsequent evaluation of RCCP during the 1988–1989 school year focused on four of the city's school districts: 2 (Manhattan), 15 (Brooklyn), 27 (Queens), and 75 (Citywide Special Education). Replicating the results of the previous year's evaluation, surveys of teachers and administrators revealed high enthusiasm for the program and a widespread belief that the curriculum increased students' use of nonviolent means of conflict resolution.

Two-thirds of the teachers said that overall implementation of the curriculum was very good or excellent. More than 51 percent said they devoted four to five classroom periods per month to teaching the curriculum, while 21 percent said that they devoted six to eight lessons per month. Fully 85 percent said they were able to incorporate prevention lessons into the rest of their regular academic curriculum.

In a pilot study conducted that same year, students in grades 4–6 who received the curriculum showed greater gains on a knowledge test designed to measure understanding of conflict resolution concepts and skills (such as conflict, active listening, and mediation). Overall, 67 percent of these RCCP students agreed that when a conflict arises, it is possible for everyone to win, compared to only 35 percent of the control group students who had not participated in the program. In addition, the RCCP students reported having fewer fights and engaging less frequently in name-calling compared to those in the control group.[13]

Most teachers agreed that student behavior had changed because of RCCP. Fully 71 percent reported moderate or great decreases in physical violence in the classroom, while 66 percent observed less name-calling and fewer verbal put-downs. Similar percentages said that students were showing better perspective-taking skills, a greater willingness to cooperate, and more "caring behavior."

importantly, the teachers reported that they had changed, too. Roughly 9 out of 10 said that they had an improved understanding of children's needs and concerns and were now more willing to let students take responsibility for solving their own conflicts. Fully 84 percent said that their own listening skills had improved. Many also noted that they had applied their increased knowledge of conflict resolution techniques in their personal lives.

About 4 out of 10 teachers said they planned to explore the RCCP curriculum in greater depth with their students. The same number said they would continue to find ways of integrating the RCCP curriculum into their daily classroom instruction. Thus, while teachers viewed the program favorably, much more work is needed to make the RCCP a top priority for all teachers.

RCCP should be applauded for undertaking an evaluation of its program, an unusual step among school-based violence prevention programs. Evens so, the staff recognizes that further research is needed to focus on the programs actual impact on behavior, using more rigorous evaluation designs and measures of actual behavior. An evaluation funded by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) is now under way.

### *Mediation Program*

The mediation program in Brooklyn's Community School District 15 was evaluated during the 1988–1989 school year, with surveys of approximately 150 teachers and students, plus 143 student mediators in five schools with medication programs. There was an average of 107 successful student mediations per school. Fully 89 percent of the teachers agreed that the mediation program had helped students take more responsibility for solving their own problems. Over 80 percent of both teachers and students said that students has been helped through their contact with the mediators.

The student mediators benefitted, too. Eighty-four percent of them agreed that the mediation process helped them understand people with different views. Many felt it helped them with their own lives. Said one secondary school student:

> [After being a mediator in my school], I have begun to use the same skills in my own conflicts. I try to think of why the other person is doing what they're doing and what is going on in their head[s]. I try to think of how we could come to a solution. I guess you could say I try to mediate my own conflicts, and it's working a lot better.

Teachers agreed that the program was beneficial to mediators: 85 percent indicated that being a mediator had increased students' self-esteem.

For some students, their involvement has been nothing less than a conversion experience, changing them from schoolyard bully to peacemaker. An RCCP in the Vista Unified School District in Southern California has created a Young Ambassadors Club, a group of students (some of whom are gang-involved), who are trained to be mediators. As a result of the club, some of the kids decided to leave their gangs, even though they had said previously that they felt trapped into staying.

## The Future

RCCP began with 18 teachers and 3 schools in Brooklyn's Community School District 15, which asked Linda Lantieri and ESR's Tom Roderick to develop the program. RCCP did not expand to other school districts until 1988, after three years of experimentation and fine-tuning. Now, just eight years after its inception, RCCP reaches tens of thousands of students every year.

Citywide demand for the program has soared, but RCCP continues its program of deliberate, managed growth, believing that no other course will enable the project to maintain its high standards.

Accordingly, expansion beyond New York City has only recently begun. RCCP has been replicated in Anchorage, New Orleans, the Vista Unified School District in Southern California, and, most recently, the South Orange-Maplewood School District in New Jersey. Once the program is shown to work in these diverse settings, RCCP's leadership will explore various options for disseminating the program nationwide, still being mindful of the need for managed growth.

> Jett Ritorto's fifth-graders at P.S. 321 discuss their worries about violence. "We hear gunshots in our neighborhood," reports one boy. "I heard somebody's mother just got shot," adds another.
>
> Their anxiety is plainly seen. They talk excitedly, forgetting to raise their hands. Many of the students fret about next year's transition to junior high, their alarm fed by news reports of students being shot at school. "It's a jungle out there," a girl concludes.
>
> "What makes our school different?" Ritorto asks. "Do we have a lot of fights in this school?"
>
> "Yes," a boy responds, "but here we don't carry on too much, not like in the real world. Here, we know each other."

The real world—with that simple cliché, this young boy has touched on one of the key questions about RCCP: Can students use these conflict resolution lessons in the outside world, where the ethic of the streets supports not win-win solutions to conflict but the rightness of power?

Some students will find it impossible to apply what they have learned, due to the circumstances in which they live, but many others are emboldened to try, and that is an important first step. In fact, when they do try, many students are surprised by their success.

RCCP's leadership is also realistic enough to know that this program is only part of what needs to be done. Linda Lantieri has written:

> Sometimes when people get excited about a new idea, they tend to see it as a panacea. . . .Violence has many sources, among them drugs, poverty, and racism. Conflict resolution can help, but will be most effective as part of a larger strategy.[14]

Programs such as RCCP may be only a part of what needs to be done, but they are an essential part. We need to change social norms in the United States so that violence is truly viewed as a last resort and people instinctively search for creative, nonviolent solutions to conflict. RCCP, with its focus on creating the "peaceable school," has shown us how to begin.

## Endnotes

1. Linda Lantieri is now director of the RCCP National Center in New York City, which was established to coordinate future nationwide replications of the RCCP.
2. T. Roderick, "Johnny Can Learn to Negotiate," *Educational Leadership*, (December/January, 1988):87–90; K. Teltsch, "Reacting to Rising Violence, Schools Introduce 'Fourth R': Reconciliation," *The New York Times, Education*, (December 26, 1990).
3. Public Health Service, U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Healthy People 2000: National Health Promotion and Disease Prevention Objectives*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1991), DHHS Pub. No. PHS–91–50212.
4. M. Miedzian, *Boys Will Be Boys: Breaking the Link Between Masculinity and Violence*, (New York: Doubleday, 1991).
5. S. Cohen and R. Wilson-Brewer, *Violence Prevention for Young Adolescents: The State of the Art of Program Evaluation*, (Washington, DC: Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1991).
6. L. Lantieri, "Childhood Cut Short," *Time*, (Letter), (March 30, 1992).
7. V. Floresca-Cawagas, L. Lantieri, and the Project "Preparedness for Peace," *Creative Conflict Resolution, Values Education, and Social Action: Peace Education from New York City to the Philippines*, (Malmo, Sweden: School of Education, University of Lund, 1989).
8. L. Lantieri and T. Roderick, "A New Way of Fighting," *RCCP News* (January 1990):1,4–5.
9. This and other vignettes were adapted from *Peace -- It Means the World to Us: Real Moments in the Lives of Participants in the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program*, (New York: Educators for Social Responsibility, 1992).
10. RCCP currently plans to videotape all of its lessons, which teachers can use to help prepare their classes.
11. R. Fisher and W. Ury, *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement Without Giving in*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981).

12. P. Ray, "Parents Teaching Parents in District 15," *RCCP News*, (June 1990):4–5,7.13. Unfortunately, the Metis report does not provide these specific data, leaving the real magnitude of this outcome in doubt.

13. Unfortunately, the Metis report does not provide these specific data, leaving the real magnitude of this outcome in doubt.

14. L. Lantieri, "An Eye for an Eye Makes the Whole World Blind, *UFA Bulletin*, (October 28, 1991):19.

# Chapter 4

# Community-Based Strategies:
## Violence Prevention Project (Boston, Massachusetts)

This wasn't supposed to happen, not on Woodville Avenue. Everything was done to keep this going-away party free of drugs, alcohol, and weapons—everything. In fact, all 50 guests were frisked before coming into the house and joining the fun.

Close to midnight, when the party was in full swing, a scuffle broke out between two guests. One of the young men who had been fighting was Randy Snyder, 15, a friend of one of the disc jockeys hired for the party. The hostess's mother, on hand to supervise, asked the young men to quiet down or leave, and when they refused, she announced that the party was over and asked everyone to go.

Outside now, about a dozen young men congregated in a garden next to the house. There was yelling. Witnesses later said that Snyder's friends kept telling him to cool down, to walk away. Then there was gunfire, and Snyder fell to the sidewalk, shot in the back with a small caliber weapon. The police were called. Snyder was rushed to Boston City Hospital, where he died about two hours later.

For the residents of Woodville Avenue in Roxbury—what one man described as a peaceful, family-oriented street—Snyder's death was one more reminder that no one is safe from the epidemic of violence that grips the Nation's major cities.

The Violence Prevention Project (VPP) is a community-based outreach and education project run by Boston's Department of Health and Hospitals as part of its Health Promotion Program for Urban Youth. With foundation support, the project began in 1986 as a three-year pilot program, with an initial focus on two neighborhoods, Roxbury and South Boston.[1] Based on the results of that pilot effort, the project was made an integral part of the Mayor's Safe Neighborhoods Plan and now has a citywide focus.[2]

The VPP's objectives include (1) training staff from youth agencies how to teach adolescents about the risks of violence and the preventive measures they can take to avoid being drawn into fights, (2) assessing the safety and psychological needs of adolescents who have been victims of violence, and (3) using community networking and the mass media to create a new community ethos in support of violence prevention. Programs like VPP are important for raising public awareness of the problem and binding local resources into a cohesive force for change.[3] Such programs also expand the variety and number of venues in which at-risk youth can be taught the lessons of nonviolent conflict resolution.

This chapter introduces community-based violence prevention programs through the example of the VPP. Founded by Dr. Deborah Prothrow-Stith, then a physician at Boston City Hospital and later the Commissioner of Public Health under Governor Michael Dukakis, VPP was the first program in the Nation to use a comprehensive, community-based approach to prevent adolescent violence.[4] With its expanded mandate, VPP has entered a critical transition period as it tries to meet the growing needs of an entire city. Even so, the program remains an important model for mobilizing community action, worthy of replication. Another noteworthy community-

based program, the Youth at Risk Program developed by the Breakthrough Foundation in San Francisco, is described in appendix C.

How police and other criminal justice professionals can be involved in community-based violence prevention work is described in chapter 6.

## VPP Program Philosophy

### *The Nature of Conflict*

The VPP's core message is that violence is a learned behavior and therefore preventable. Gang violence captures the headlines, but it is not the essence of the crisis. The more central problem is that elements of American culture promote the use of violence to resolve conflict, not as a final option, but as a first resort. When parents continue to teach their children that they have to stand up to bullies by fighting, when peers continue to expect any insult, no matter how mild, to be met with violence, and when the mass media continue to depict violence as the hero's way to resolve conflict, the task of changing the culture of violence seems impossible. VPP's mission, quite simply, is to convince us otherwise.

According to VPP, we must help adolescents discover that whatever gains fighting might bring are far outweighed by the risk of death or serious injury. Even so, because elements of U.S. culture tell young people that violence works and because they see that it sometimes does, at least in the short run, it is difficult to convince them at first that nonviolent conflict resolution makes sense. Their need to save face, their need not to look like a victim, a "wimp," or a "chump," is all important. The key, then, is to help young people recognize that "fight or flight" are not the only options, that real strength of character can be found in avoiding unnecessary fights and finding positive ways to deal with anger.

### *Changing a Community Ethos*

VPP began with development of the *Violence Prevention Curriculum for Adolescents*, a high school curriculum developed by Dr. Prothrow-Stith.[5] As the curriculum was introduced, the VPP's leadership realized that working in the schools alone was not enough, that the message of violence prevention also needs to be reinforced in the larger community. One reason is that so many of the adolescents who are at risk have dropped out of school. However, those who have remained in school need to hear that their entire community is behind this effort, and they need to hear that message repeatedly from a variety of sources.

The project has sought to achieve its mission through the broad implementation of a community education campaign, working first in Roxbury and South Boston, and now in all 12 of the city's districts. VPP's core activity is to teach staff from community-based youth agencies how to use lessons from the high school curriculum in their own violence prevention program. To facilitate this work, the project is now moving to create a new coalition focused on youth violence.

In VPP's first year, its community education program was coupled with the reinforcing power of a mass media campaign, which was developed *pro bono* through the Advertising Club of Greater Boston. Designed to raise public awareness of the issue of adolescent violence, the campaign featured a set of public service announcements (PSAs) on the role of peer pressure and the responsibility that friends have for helping to defuse conflict situations. With the theme "Friends for Life Don't Let Friends Fight," the Advertising Club produced two television PSAs, radio PSAs, posters, and T-shirts for the campaign.

More recently, VPP has launched several experiments that might emerge as important components of its future program. One is a peer leadership program, for which VPP staff recruits, trains, and supervises a small group of youth leaders who do conflict resolution and violence prevention work among their peers. Another is a program for summer camps, which combines firm camp policies in support of nonviolent conflict resolution with training for the counselors and other camp staff. VPP's continuing innovation is one of its principal strengths.

## Violence Prevention Curriculum

Moved by her work in the emergency room at Boston City Hospital and startled by national statistics showing that violence is the leading cause of death for young black men, Dr. Prothrow-Stith began teaching a course in Boston high schools to tell students what she was seeing and to help them understand the dangers of fighting.[6]

Her next step was to translate her course into a written curriculum so that other high school teachers could begin teaching youth how to stay out of fights. The *Violence Prevention Curriculum for Adolescents*, produced in collaboration with Education Development Center in 1987, provides the philosophical foundation for VPP's efforts and the basis for its many training programs.

The curriculum takes the view that homicide and physical assault are preventable public health problems. Its dominant

theme is that one of the primary challenges of growing up is to use anger as a positive force for constructive and nonviolent conflict resolution rather than to respond with either violence or passivity.

### *Lesson Plans*

The curriculum has 10 sessions. It invites high school teachers to use a variety of pedagogical techniques to encourage active student involvement, including brainstorming, "mini-lectures," role-plays, and class discussion.

The first three sessions provide descriptive information on risk factors for violence and homicide. In session 1, using a word-association exercise, the instructor determines what information (and misinformation) the students already have about violence, its causes, and its effects. Through discussion, the students learn about the nature and extent of violence in society, especially violence among acquaintances.

In session 2, through a review of national statistics, the students learn that homicide is a leading cause of death for young people ages 15–24. They also learn to define a statistically "typical" homicide, in terms of precipitating events (usually an argument), the role of alcohol consumption, and the types of weapons used (see figure 4.1).

In session 3, the class continues to explore the risk factors identified in the previous session. The students learn about the effects of alcohol on the brain and its role in interpersonal violence, how the availability of a handgun can turn what would otherwise have been a fight between friends into a homicide, and the primacy of socioeconomic conditions, not race, as an underlying cause of interpersonal violence.

The next three sessions focus on the role of anger in interpersonal violence and how anger can be channeled constructively. In session 4, the students learn that anger is a normal part of life, involving both emotional and physiological responses. During a brainstorming activity, the students list the many things that can make them angry.

In session 5, the students generate a list of ways for dealing with anger, which normally includes problem solving, "cool-

**Figure 4.1**

**Profile: A Typical Homicide**

**Friends + Alcohol/Drugs + Argument + Weapon = Homicide**

**Friends**

Violence often occurs between people who know one another.

**Alcohol/Drugs**

Over half of homicide victims have alcohol in their blood.

**Argument**

Most murders are the result of an argument or unresolved conflict that gets out of control.

**Weapon**

Most murders are committed in the heat of an argument, when a handgun or knife is readily accessible.

ing off," distraction, and violence. The instructor helps the class establish whether these are healthy or unhealthy choices.

In session 6, the students list the good and bad results of fighting, from which they discover that they have much more to lose than gain from fighting. Moreover, the "good" results depend on winning the fight.

The last four sessions introduce alternative means of conflict resolution. In session 7, the students develop and act out role-plays of typical conflicts that lead to fighting. Ideally, arrangements are made to videotape the role-plays for analysis by the class in the next session. If that is not possible, live role-plays based on scripts from the curriculum can be used instead.

In session 8, the class views and discusses the videotape made in the previous session. The instructor leads the students through an analysis of the role-plays, noting that fights do not just happen but evolve through a series of steps marked by rising levels of emotion and clear nonverbal signals.

Importantly, the instructor asks the students to identify when there was an opportunity to prevent or intervene in the fight, what they would have done, and what the positive or negative consequences of that action might have been. The students learn that preventive steps have a better chance of working if they are taken early on.

In session 9, the students consider how they can handle common, but potentially volatile, situations that sometimes lead to violence. "Fight" and "flight" are not the only options. At first, students have trouble generating nonviolent solutions and express doubts about whether they will work. One reason for this difficulty is that violence is glamorized by U.S. entertainment media, as revealed in television logs that the students have kept.

In session 10, the students rehearse a specific strategy to avoid being drawn into a fight, called "throwing a curve." The key is to do something unexpected, whether it is making a joke, apologizing, stating a reluctance to fight, or simply acting in a friendly manner. Figuring out what to do requires staying calm and in control while trying to understand the other person's point of view.

### *Assessment*

An evaluation of the curriculum's impact on high school students' knowledge, attitudes, and self-reported behavior shows that this brief, 10-session curriculum has a positive impact on many students.[7] The evaluation, funded by the National Institute of Justice, was conducted during the 1987–1988 school year in four inner-city high schools across the country. After attending a one-day training session, each participating teacher taught the curriculum to two or three classes and selected other classes to be in a comparison group.

The students filled out a questionnaire before the curriculum was taught (pretest). The teachers presented the 10-lesson curriculum over two successive weeks. About one month later, the students completed a second questionnaire (post-test). A total of 347 students completed both the pretest and post-test questionnaires.

Across all four schools, students who received the curriculum reported having fewer fights during the past week than did those in the comparison classes ($p = .013$). This difference in self-reported behavior might be due either to actual changes in behavior or to changes in the students' attitudes, which made them less willing to admit to being in a fight. For four other dependent measures, differences were found between curriculum and comparison classes in some of the schools but not others.

### *Curriculum Adaptations*

VPP staff, school teachers, and community-based youth workers have introduced a number of adaptations and supplemental activities to the violence prevention curriculum. Typical examples include using local statistics to supplement the national homicide statistics presented in session 2, having police officers or emergency room nurses visit the class to talk about their experiences, and having the students cut out newspaper articles about violence and assemble them in a collage.

The curriculum's central purpose is to alert students to the risks of fighting and to make them more mindful of the options they have for avoiding being drawn into a fight. This is an important beginning, but the VPP staff notes that the culture of violence in U.S. cities is so pervasive that longer, more intensive training is needed to help students learn how to resolve conflict nonviolently. For that reason, the VPP staff has added sessions on communication and decision making. They also cite the need for still other sessions on negotiation, mediation, domestic violence, and dating violence.

## Training Community-Based Agencies

VPP's core activity is teaching staff from community-based agencies how to use lessons from the *Violence Prevention Curriculum for Adolescents* (plus additional sessions on

communication skills and decision making) in their work with youth. Those who have been trained include community educators based at multiservice centers, youth clubs, recreation programs, houses of worship, housing developments, juvenile detention facilities, and neighborhood health centers. VPP staff have also trained approximately 200 Boston school teachers as part of the school district's drug-free schools program. Once trained, these individuals serve as change agents in their communities, helping at-risk youth develop their anger management and conflict resolution skills.

For the pilot program in Roxbury and South Boston, VPP hired two community organizers to identify and make contact with appropriate community agencies. The project now has three educators who conduct two-day, bimonthly trainings, and, while they do some outreach, the program is well enough known in Boston that it now fields more requests for training than its small staff can handle.

Providing technical assistance after the training is also a vital aspect of VPP's work, since most community sites cannot accommodate the curriculum's 10-session format and therefore need additional help to adapt the curriculum to suit their needs. Recently, the demands for training have outstripped the project's ability to meet the agencies' technical assistance needs. VPP staff also participate in conferences, such as an Anti-Violence Summit held at Roxbury Community College, to help these community agencies develop their long-range plans.

VPP's hope is that violence prevention activities will become institutionalized as part of the agencies' services. VPP offers a variety of options for agencies to consider. Neighborhood health centers, for example, can show violence prevention videos in their waiting rooms and add screening questions about violence to their intake and medical history protocols.[8] Recreation centers can develop workshops based on the curriculum, train peer leaders, or sponsor special events, such as poster contests or theater group performances. Tenant organizations can hold parent workshops and publish prevention-related articles in a newsletter. Houses of worship can integrate violence prevention into their religious instruction and convene special prayer groups.

A process evaluation of the pilot program showed that, between January 1987 and October 1988, VPP was in contact with 92 community agencies from Roxbury and South Boston. Of those, 42 percent actually went on to provide some form of violence prevention education to the adolescents they served. While some of these agencies conducted one-time events, such as health fairs or rap contests, nearly half created ongoing educational activities.[9]

There were many success stories. In South Boston, for example, the West Broadway Housing Task Force, which runs a teen drop-in center, began providing workshops on violence prevention and made violence a point of concern in one-on-one counseling sessions. The South Boston Boys and Girls Club formed a "Friends for Life" club, which involved its members in a variety of prevention activities.

Agencies were more likely to implement violence prevention activities if they served large numbers of adolescents, if they already had an educational or counseling program that could incorporate the violence prevention message, and if there was a strong commitment from the agency's leadership. VPP had its greatest success with schools and youth-serving organizations. Churches and other organizations that serve the general public were less likely to implement any violence prevention activities.

Estimates of the number of youth reached during the evaluation period vary. An examination of project records (such as staff diaries, weekly reports, and client files) led to an estimate of 3,450 youth reached, which would represent 22 percent of the total adolescent population from the two targeted neighborhoods. The evaluators note, however, that the accuracy of the recorded attendance for larger events was doubtful and that an unknown number of teens probably attended more than one event. A telephone survey of Boston teens (described below) led to an estimate that 13 percent of the target population was reached.

Trained agency personnel reported that the training and technical assistance provided by VPP gave them the tools and skills they needed to address the issue of violence with the youth they serve, while also helping create institutional support for their efforts. Perhaps the most significant outcome was the impact of the training on the service providers themselves. Many began with attitudes similar to those of their young clients, thinking that violence is an appropriate—and perhaps inevitable—response to conflict. After their training, many reported that they had worked to change the way they handle their anger when interacting with the adolescents in their charge.[10]

VPP supports its work in the community by publishing a newsletter, *Against the Tide*, which includes announcements of community events, stories on program developments, editorials, and a column written by teens in VPP's peer leadership program (see below). On a humorous note, the newsletter also has a feature called "Bite the Bullet," in which a person, group, or advertiser is given a "dishonorable mention" for making a statement that has the potential for encouraging violence.

### *Summer Camps*

The VPP program is now offered to seven summer camps in the greater Boston area that serve elementary and middle school-aged children. VPP's focus is to create a camp ethos that fosters nonviolence. VPP staff notes that because summer camps are a less structured environment than schools, with hundreds of children who are new to one another, they are a fertile ground for conflict—and fights.

Each participating camp adopts VPP-recommended policies that prohibit name-calling, fighting, and even being a bystander to a fight. Instead, if a fight breaks out, campers should either try to prevent it or alert one of the counselors. These policies also make clear that camp activities will be interrupted so that a group of campers can process a conflict that has occurred.

The counselors are provided with a half-day training session as part of their orientation. The counselors are reminded that, because they serve as role models to the campers, they must be mindful of how they handle any conflicts that arise, either with other staff or the campers themselves. In addition to introducing basic concepts from the violence prevention curriculum, the training also reviews guidelines for how to discipline children using reasoning and quiet firmness.

The counselors are provided with a suggested syllabus for lessons on violence prevention, communication, and decision making, which outlines an activity for each week of camp. In addition, the counselors are encouraged to begin each morning with a skit, game, or other group activity that reinforces the nonviolence message, and to end each day with a brief reflection on any conflicts that arose and how they were handled.

Reporting forms are used to give the program greater structure. First, the counselors are to complete activity logs that itemize their violence prevention work with the campers. Second, they are to complete incident reports that describe any fights, how they were resolved, and what follow-up is planned. There is also a so-called fight form, to be completed by the campers, which is designed to help them process a conflict they have had (see figure 4.2).

VPP staff provide additional support during the camp sessions, by holding midterm and end-of-season meetings with the camp directors and by conducting site visits to review the counselors' activity logs and to troubleshoot any problems that have come up. The staff will also accommodate requests for special technical assistance.

In three years, VPP has trained over 400 camp counselors and directors. The camps do not do everything that VPP recommends, but those that have participated in the program report good results, noting that they have not had a single major episode of violence since working with VPP. A formal evaluation of the camp program has not been conducted, however. VPP's approach to working with summer camps is summarized in a recently prepared manual, entitled *Violence Free Camp: A How-To Guide*.[11]

As VPP seeks to improve this program, the principal need they have identified is to expand the counselor training program, both to include more detailed lessons on conducting violence prevention workshops with the campers and to allow more time for the counselors to practice their conflict resolution skills.

### *Youth Leadership Program*

A recent addition to VPP is the Violence Prevention Club, a peer leadership program, which was established on the premise that peers, because they are perceived as equals, can play an important role in delivering public health messages. While the program provides yet another way to reach teens with VPP's message of nonviolent conflict resolution, it is intended to influence the peer leaders as well, many of whom have had previous contact with the criminal justice system. Being a role model for others builds self-esteem while also reinforcing the positive changes that peer leaders have made in their lives.

In 1991, VPP trained an initial core of 14 peer leaders. The training emphasized how to design presentations for a variety of groups, including peers, younger teens, and parents, and gave the peer leaders ample time to practice conducting workshop sessions on domestic violence, dating violence, and conflict resolution. The 1991 training sessions were videotaped so that a two-hour instructional video could be produced. An eight-session peer leadership training syllabus is also under development.

After training, the peer leaders began to prepare and present workshops at a variety of agencies and shelters. Some peer leaders were already involved with other youth services agencies and were able to add the violence prevention lessons to their ongoing work. The peer leaders are multilingual; workshops can be presented in English, Portuguese, or Spanish.

VPP staff is available to provide ongoing technical assistance to the peer leaders. As one VPP educator explained, VPP staff has befriended the peer leaders, helping them find work, contacting social services agencies on their behalf, and even doing crisis intervention with their families.

## Figure 4.2

## A Fight at Camp: One Conflict, Two Perspectives

The following is a summary of the fight reports independently completed by two boys who had a fight at camp, as written by a counselor who took dictation.

**Why did you start fighting?**

1. He stepped on my heel and caused me to trip.
2. He called me names and pushed me.

**Why did the other person fight with you?**

1. I shoved him and called him names.
2. He said I stepped on his heel.

**Did fighting solve the problem?**

1. No.
2. No.

**What would solve the problem?**

1. Not overreacting. Even if I'm annoyed, I should respond with self-control by saying, "Excuse me, but you stepped on my heel. Please be careful."
2. I should respond to his complaint respectfully, whether I stepped on his heel or not, and apologize by saying, "If I did step on your heel, I'm sorry."

**What are you willing to compromise for it?**

1. My pride, because he made me look silly. Also peer acceptance, because my peers pressure me to respond with violence.
2. My pride.

**What are three things you might try if this happens again?**

1. Say, "Excuse me, but you stepped on my heel. Please be careful, okay?" Not overreact, even though I'm hot and grouchy. Don't let my peers pressure me into reacting violently.
2. Apologize. Be more careful about where I step. If he calls me names, walk away quietly.

**Is there anything you would like to say to the person you fought with?**

1. I'm sorry the whole thing happened and for calling you names and shoving you. Let's be friends.
2. I'm sorry about what happened. Let's be friends again.

The peer leaders are also involved in other work with VPP, sometimes helping with routine office work, other times with special projects. A current project in development is a teen survival handbook, which will tell Boston teens how to avoid violence and where to get help if they are victimized or are having trouble handling anger and conflict. Peer leaders also join VPP staff in giving presentations at conferences or public health fairs, assist at trainings, and contribute articles to the VPP newsletter, *Against the Tide*.

## Coalition Building

In the next phase of its work to mobilize the Boston community, VPP is seeking to organize a coalition of service providers, teachers and school administrators, juvenile justice officials, parents, and other community residents concerned about youth violence, which it calls the Coalition for Violence Eradication in Roxbury, Dorchester, and Mattapan (or COVER/RDM). In VPP's view, agencies that participate in a coalition are more likely to institutionalize their own violence prevention activities, thereby achieving one of the project's key objectives.

Building a coalition can accomplish several objectives. First, in many cases, an entity that represents a cross-section of the community can carry more political clout than any one agency alone, making it possible to advocate for better services or policy change. Second, by keeping one another informed of their activities, participating agencies can avoid wasteful duplication of effort while also identifying opportunities for meaningful collaboration. Third, these agencies can train personnel from their fellow agencies and provide technical assistance to one another, thereby enhancing each agency's capacity for doing effective violence prevention work. Specific training needs include violence prevention, negotiation and mediation, public speaking, working with the news media, and grant writing.

What generates the most excitement as agencies begin to collaborate is the opportunity for developing new initiatives. Possibilities to be considered by the new coalition include a "gang watch" program, an information clearinghouse and video resource library, a parent education program, a public lecture series, a monthly cable television program, a radio talk show for teens, and a new PSA campaign. Interest has also been expressed in forming a youth coalition whose members would advise COVER/RDM and serve as peer leaders/educators.

VPP staff notes several prerequisites to forming a successful interagency coalition:

- There must be a strong commitment from the leadership of each participating agency.
- Each agency should submit an annual plan outlining what they hope to accomplish on the violence issue.
- Each agency must have a defined role in the coalition.
- Each agency must have a health promotion program of some type already in place or be willing to develop such a program (for example, substance use prevention or teen pregnancy prevention).
- Each agency must assign one or more staff members whose responsibilities include working with the coalition.
- Those assigned personnel should have the authority to make changes in their organization that will facilitate its work with the coalition.
- The coalition should meet formally at least once a month.

VPP staff also prefer that all agency personnel, not just those working on behalf of the coalition, be trained in violence prevention.

VPP's past efforts to organize a community coalition fell short of original expectations, due to unclear objectives, a failure to secure full commitments from the leadership of the participating agencies, and a turnover in both VPP and agency staff. Having learned from that experience, VPP is optimistic that its new coalition can emerge as a major force for change in the city. Early planning meetings and a needs assessment are currently under way.

## Media Campaign

To supplement its early work in Roxbury and South Boston, VPP planned and executed a mass media campaign to increase public awareness of the problem of adolescent violence and to reinforce the project's message that young people need to handle conflict in productive and nonviolent ways.

The Boston advertising agency Hill, Holiday, Connors, and Cosmopulos, working through the Advertising Club of Greater

Boston, developed two television public service announcements (PSAs). With the theme "Friends for Life Don't Let Friends Fight," the PSAs focused on the tragic consequences of fighting, the role of peer pressure in catalyzing violence, and the responsibility that friends have for helping diffuse conflict.

In one PSA, the audience sees a young man leaning over the body of his friend, who has just been shot. Lamenting his role in pushing his friend to fight, he cries out, "I didn't know he had a gun!" In the other, we see a young woman crying over her dead boyfriend, "Why did I tell you he was coming on to me?"

The campaign also included radio PSAs and posters, brochures, and T-shirts that were distributed at VPP events (see figure 4.3).

Typical of most public service campaigns, the "Friends for Life" spots aired during unsold time contributed by Boston-area television stations. How often the spots actually aired is unknown, since stations typically do not make this information available. What can be said, however, is that fully 43 percent of Boston teens surveyed about one year after the campaign began said that they recognized the "Friends for Life" slogan. In the Roxbury and South Boston target areas, the principal way in which teens were exposed to the VPP's message was not its community-based education program but the media campaign.[12]

Since this initial campaign, VPP has not emphasized work with the mass media, concentrating instead on expanding its basic program citywide. Recently, VPP staff helped develop a comic book called *Friends High*, which presents simple stories designed to teach teens how to solve problems in healthy ways and to find alternatives to fighting. The staff is currently working with a group of peer leaders to develop scripts for a new set of PSAs to reach young teens.

## Clinical Intervention

The trauma of being wounded in a fight that escalated out of control is harrowing. Whatever the circumstances, young victims are willing to talk about their experience. For those who are hospitalized, this creates an opportunity to teach them skills for managing conflict and to help them make alternative choices in their lives.[13] Without such an intervention, these victims return to the streets, still at risk for post-traumatic stress, further victimization, or perpetuating the cycle of violence through acts of vengeance. The need is substantial. In fiscal year 1991, the Boston City Hospital treated 270 youths under age 19 for gunshot or stab wounds, half of whom were admitted.[14]

For this reason, VPP helped establish the Pediatric Interpersonal Violence Trauma Team at Boston City Hospital to provide psychological assessment and a short-term educational program for adolescents hospitalized with severe injuries stemming from an act of violence. This multidisciplinary team includes VPP's Clinical Services Coordinator, pediatric nurses, social workers, chaplains, and child psychiatric staff at the hospital.

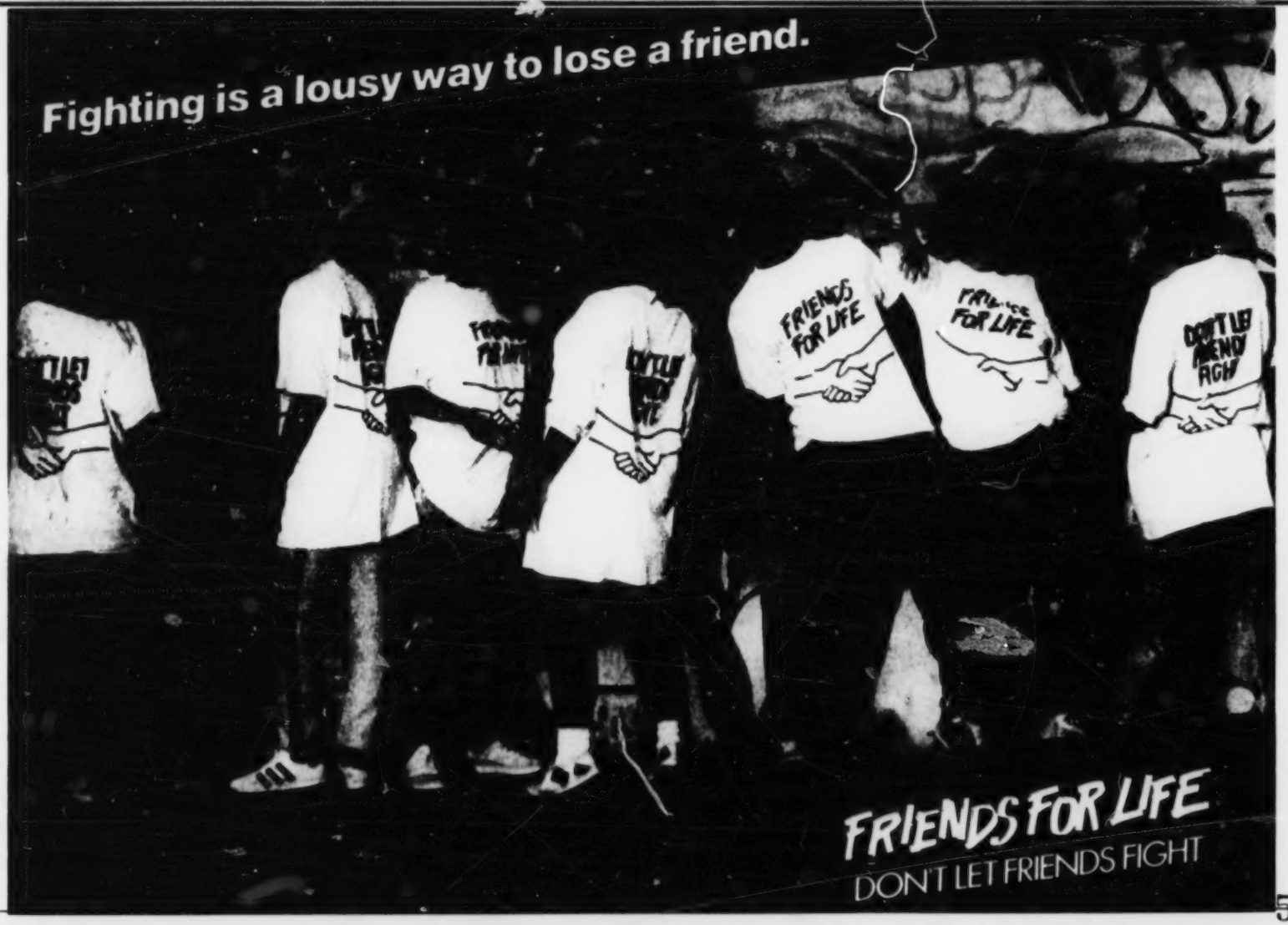
An earlier VPP program was based in the hospital's emergency room, but it failed, according to VPP staff, due to problems in recruiting youth to participate and the incessant demands on ER staff. With a focus on hospitalized patients, these same difficulties have not been encountered. The trauma team has been in place now for three years, seeing approximately four adolescent patients per month, most of whom are African-American males.

To initiate the process, the team reviews the incident with the patient, helping him to recall the details of the event and to express his feelings about it, all in hopes of short-circuiting any maladaptive responses such as denial or avoidance. The team conducts a risk assessment, looking at how the patient manages anger, his penchant for fighting and other antisocial behavior, and whether he typically carries weapons and uses drugs or alcohol. The patient is told that, should he fail to alter his behavior, the likelihood of his being wounded again or killed is very high. "Wasted Dreams," a video that features paraplegic victims of violence talking about their experience, is used to underscore this point.

The next step is to talk to the patient about how he normally responds to conflict and whether those strategies seem to be effective or not. This leads to a discussion of alternative strategies for avoiding violence and an exploration of how those strategies can be applied in specific situations.

The team also assesses the patient's inner resources and the type of support system that is available to him. According to VPP staff, research has shown that people with strong personal relationships and good support systems are better able to deal with and learn from a crisis. Spiritual values, reinforced by membership in a church, can also be an important source of support. In some cases, then, the team will refer the patient to the hospital's pastoral counseling staff and encourage him to get involved in the after-school and weekend activities at his church.

**Figure 4.3: Campaign Poster: Friends for Life Don't Let Friends Fight**
**—Provided by Violence Prevention Project (Boston, Massachusetts)**








BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Next, the team reviews with the patient specific strategies for how he can stay safe after being discharged from the hospital. A range of possibilities is discussed, from how to remove oneself from a potentially violent situation to friendship choices and learning nonviolent conflict resolution skills. In some instances, the team has referred patients to a local Boys and Girls Club that offers a violence prevention program.

As necessary, the team can make referrals for a variety of in-house services, including outpatient psychiatric care, substance abuse treatment, and so forth. Referrals to outside service providers are possible as well. Indeed, referrals to vocational, social services, and mental health providers are common. A case manager is available to help the patient follow up with these referrals and keep appointments.

This is a limited intervention. Indeed, if the victim's injuries are not severe, he might stay in the hospital for only one or two days, which leaves little time for discussion or reflection. Looking to the future, VPP sees the need for a one-month "booster" session, longer-term case management, and a greater number of community-based programs to which patients can be referred. A proposal to evaluate the trauma team is pending.

## Organization and Budget

The Violence Prevention Project is part of the Health Promotion Program for Urban Youth, based in Boston's Department of Health and Hospitals. In fiscal year 1992, the city budget allocated approximately $312,000 to cover 7.5 FTE staff, plus an additional $12,000 for direct costs (such as consultants, printing, supplies, and travel). The balance of VPP's budget is derived from government and private foundation grants for special projects.

Key project staff include the director, who is responsible for overall project management and staff supervision, liaison with outside agencies, representing VPP at public events and to the news media, and developing new initiatives. The assistant director oversees VPP's day-to-day operations (monthly reports, budgets, personnel) and the community outreach and training program. The assistant director also oversees VPP's training program, aided by the assistant training coordinator.

Three community health and education trainers work with community-based organizations to develop and implement violence prevention trainings. In addition, two of them direct the peer leadership program and prepare new educational materials. The staff is rounded out by the clinical services coordinator, who is part of the interpersonal violence trauma team at Boston City Hospital; a special projects coordinator, who organizes regional skills-building conferences and other educational events; a coalition coordinator, who is responsible for overseeing the new VPP-led community coalition, COVER/RDM; and an administrative assistant.

## Evaluation

An evaluation of the pilot program in Roxbury and South Boston was conducted by Dr. Alice Hausman of Temple University. The evaluation had two major components: (1) a process evaluation to tally how many agencies received violence prevention training, how many of those agencies went on to create a violence prevention intervention of their own, and how many adolescents they subsequently reached; and (2) an outcome evaluation to assess the impact of this effort and VPP's media campaign on the knowledge, attitudes, and behavior of the adolescents living in those two neighborhoods. Findings from the process evaluation were described earlier. This section outlines the major findings from the outcome evaluation.

The main vehicle for evaluating the impact of the Roxbury and South Boston pilot program was a random-digit dial survey conducted in the fall of 1988, when the project and the media campaign had been running for just over one year. A total of 1,200 people were interviewed, half from the targeted neighborhoods and half from other parts of Boston. Of these, 400 were teens ages 10–19, again split equally between the target and comparison areas. A household was included in the survey only if a teen resided there. Response rates across various parts of the city ranged between 53 and 66 percent.

To determine whether the teens had been exposed to any VPP-related activities, they were asked if they had participated in any classes, workshops, or discussions about violence prevention during the past year. If they had, they were asked where those had occurred, and the identified sites were matched against a list of VPP venues. Exposure to the media campaign was assumed if the respondent reported recognizing its slogan, "Friends for Life Don't Let Friends Fight."

In Roxbury and South Boston, 13 percent of the teens reported participating in one or more VPP-related activities, as did 7 percent of teens from other parts of the city.[15] This is a conservative estimate of exposure, since many teens could not recall where they had participated in the activities. When contact with the media campaign is figured in, 32 percent of the teens from the targeted neighborhoods were exposed to VPP's message during the year.[16]

The survey included a number of knowledge and attitude questions, which were combined into two summary scores. Looking at the data for all teens, regardless of neighborhood, the analysis revealed that exposure to the media campaign was significantly associated with higher knowledge and attitude scores. In contrast, exposure to a class, workshop, or discussion on violence prevention, whether it was part of VPP or not, was *not* related to higher scores.[17] The survey asked respondents to recount recent incidents of fighting or victimization, but these results were not reported.

The 21 attitude questions were categorized according to whether they were directly, peripherally, or not at all related to the media campaign. For each set of items, comparisons were made between teens who were exposed to the media campaign and those who were not. Across the board, exposure to the campaign was associated with more positive attitudes. The largest difference was found for items that were directly related to the campaign message, while the smallest difference between the two groups of teens was found for items that were not at all related. This pattern of results suggests that it was exposure to the campaign that led to the reported differences in attitude, rather than any pre-existing differences between those who said they recognized the slogan and those who did not.

In sum, the evaluators concluded that the pilot program achieved good results, though it clearly failed to reach its goal of community saturation. One reason for this, of course, is that only one community educator was assigned to each targeted neighborhood. Moreover, the follow-up survey was conducted after just one year, which gave several agencies insufficient time to introduce their own violence prevention program. Even so, the evaluation showed that VPP's community-based model of intervention has tremendous promise.

## The Future

VPP is now at a critical juncture. With the problem of youth violence making headlines almost every day and with unrelenting pressure on the staff to do anything and everything it can, the project's work has been pulled in several different directions. During VPP's first three years, when staff could concentrate on only two neighborhoods, it was possible for VPP to work intensively with the agency personnel they trained, helping these individuals figure out how to adapt the violence prevention curriculum to meet their needs and providing ongoing technical assistance. Unfortunately, with its expansion to citywide responsibilities, the project's ability to do this necessary follow-up was lost.

Efforts to correct this problem are now under way. The VPP is planning several important changes to guide its future work. Principal among these will be a reduction in the number of trainings for community agencies, which will free up staff time to provide more extensive technical assistance as the agencies develop their new programs. The project also wants stronger expressions of commitment from agencies receiving the training that they will implement some type of violence prevention activities before contracting for the training. In turn, the training sessions themselves will devote additional time to implementation planning.

One of VPP's main strengths is its adaptability, its capacity to modify its program of services as the community's needs change. What remains consistent is VPP's central mission: telling the Boston community how the culture of violence perpetuates itself; creating a new culture by teaching service providers, peer leaders, and others how they can help young people find new ways of handling conflict and anger; and mobilizing them to take action. VPP's work continues.

## Endnotes

1. When the VPP began, Roxbury was the neighborhood with the highest adolescent homicide rate, while South Boston was the neighborhood with the fastest growing homicide rate. Roxbury is primarily black, and South Boston is primarily white, but both neighborhoods are economically stressed.

2. *Safe Neighborhoods Plan for the City of Boston*, (Boston: Mayor's Office, City of Boston, April 1990).

3. Public Health Service, U.S. Department of Health and Social Behavior, *Position Papers from the Third National Injury Control Conference: Setting the National Agenda for Injury Control in the 1990s*, (Rockville, MD: PHS/USDHHS, 1992).

4. D. Prothrow-Stith, H. Spivak, and A. J. Hausman, "The Violence Prevention Project: A Public Health Approach," *Science, Technology, and Human Values*, 12(1987):67-9.; H. Spivak, A. J. Hausman, and D. Prothrow-Stith, "Practitioners' Forum: Public Health and the Primary Prevention of Adolescent Violence--The Violence Prevention Project," *Violence and Victims*, 4(1989):203–12.

5. D. Prothrow-Stith, *Violence Prevention Curriculum for Adolescents*, (Newton, MA: Education Development Center, 1987).

6. D. Prothrow-Stith, "The Fight Against Adolescent Violence: A Public Health Approach," *The Criminologist*, 14(1989):1,15–7.

7. W. DeJong, A. Spiro III, R. Wilson-Brewer, C. Vince-Whitman, D. Prothrow-Stith, and T. P. Cross, "Evaluation of a Violence Prevention Curriculum for Inner-City Adolescents," unpublished manuscript, Harvard School of Public Health, 1992.

8. With a subcontract to Education Development Center, the VPP developed a protocol for health care providers to identify high-risk patients who need supportive services. Violence Prevention Project, *Identification and Prevention of Youth Violence: A Protocol for Health Care Providers*, (Boston: Department of Health and Hospitals, City of Boston, 1992).

9. A. J. Hausman, H. Spivak, D. Prothrow-Stith, and J. Roeber, "Patterns of Teen Exposure to a Community-Based Violence Prevention Project," *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 13(1992): 668–75.

10. D. Prothrow-Stith and M. Weissman, *Deadly Consequences: How Violence Is Destroying Our Teenage Population and A Plan to Begin Solving the Problem*, (New York: Harper/Collins, 1991).

11. R. Atnafou, *Violence-Free Camp: A How-To Guide*, (Boston, MA: Department of Health and Hospitals, Violence Prevention Project, 1992).

12. A. J. Hausman, H. Spivak, D. Prothrow-Stith, and J. Roeber, "Patterns of Teen Exposure to a Community-Based Violence Prevention Project," *Journal of Adolescent Health*, (1992, in press).

13. K. S. Klingbeil, "Interpersonal Violence: A Comprehensive Model in a Hospital Setting--From Policy to Program," in Public Health Service, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, *Surgeon General's Workshop on Violence and Public Health Report*, (Rockville, MD: Human Resources and Service Administration, 1986), DHHS Pub. No. HRS-D-MC 86–1.

14. M. T. Bukuras and E. M. Pittel, "A Psychoeducational Approach to the Assessment and Treatment of Pediatric Victims of Interpersonal Violence," Paper presented at the 145th Annual Meeting of the American Psychiatric Association, May 1992.

15. Some of the community agencies are located near neighborhood boundaries so that they serve teens from both the target and comparison areas. Moreover, many teens are bused across neighborhood boundaries to achieve racial balance in the Boston schools.

16. A. J. Hausman, H. Spivak, D. Prothrow-Stith, and J. Roeber, "Patterns of Teen Exposure to a Community-Based Violence Prevention Project," *Journal of Adolescent Health*, (1992, in press).

17. A. J. Hausman, H. Spivak, and D. Prothrow-Stith, "Impact of A Community-Based Violence Prevention Project on Adolescents' Knowledge and Attitudes," unpublished manuscript, Temple University, 1992.

# Chapter 5

# Mass Media Strategies

In a tight close-up, the camera pans along a handgun, from its handle to the chamber and then to the barrel. The male announcer speaks with utmost seriousness: "If you don't get a handle on violence now . . ."

The handgun barrel dissolves into a coffin handle as the announcer continues: ". . . somebody else will later." The camera pulls back to reveal the coffin, which is decorated with a large floral bouquet.

"Walk away from violence," the announcer concludes. "Don't get carried away. For ways to avoid violence, call 1-800-###-####." The closing graphic carries the slogan of the anti-violence campaign, which is sponsored by the Wayne County, Michigan, Department of Public Health: "Walk Away. Don't Get Carried Away."

The mass media, especially television, exert enormous influence over ideas, values, and behavior.[1] The negative impact of the media, especially the portrayal of violence in entertainment, has long been of concern to violence prevention experts, but the idea that the media might be used as a force for violence prevention is just now catching hold. Leaders in the anti-violence movement are showing increased interest in using the mass media as an adjunct to their school and community programs. How police and other criminal justice professionals might join this effort is described in chapter 6.

Before reviewing mass media campaigns that have focused on violence prevention, we must first consider what such campaigns can reasonably be expected to achieve. It is important to keep in mind that interpersonal violence is a complex behavior, one that is learned early in a child's life, embedded in a cultural context, and therefore resistant to change. Learning new ways to resolve conflict is possible but only as the result of intensive, long-term instruction—and even then it can be difficult. Given that, the best use of the mass media is to reinforce school and community programs.

The opportunities are rich. First, the mass media can be used to educate the public about the nature and scope of the violence problem and to keep it at the top of the public agenda. Too often, the news media focus on unusual or sensational crimes, rather than on the more typical homicides that involve family, friends, or acquaintances.

Second, the mass media can be used to inform citizens about their community's attack on the problem and to inspire their full participation. One facet of this effort is to tell the public about successful community groups they might join, special events such as anti-violence marches, or various education or counseling programs that are available. In addition, the mass media can be used to raise funds for school and community programs.

Third, the mass media can be used to build support for changes in institutional arrangements, public policy, or law that will reduce violence by supporting and sustaining the efforts of individuals to change the way in which they try to resolve conflict.

Fourth, the mass media can be used to reinforce the lessons of school and community programs, by repeating key facts, demonstrating conflict resolution skills, and communicating a shift in social norms away from violent confrontation.

A campaign developed as part of the Boston Violence Prevention Project (VPP) was described in chapter 4. During a three-year pilot project, VPP planned and executed a media effort to increase public awareness and to reinforce the

project's central message that young people must learn to handle conflict in productive and nonviolent ways. Campaign materials included television PSAs, radio PSAs, and posters, brochures, and T-shirts distributed at VPP events. As noted, the project evaluation suggested that the media campaign was a key element in VPP's early success.

The Boston campaign illustrates an important principle: In general, the strongest media campaigns are those designed to leverage activity in the schools or the community at large.[2] Three additional examples described in this chapter also illustrate how a mass media campaign can work in sync with school and community efforts: (1) "Walk Away from Violence," sponsored by the Wayne County, Michigan, Department of Public Health; (2) "Stop the Violence," cosponsored by Jive Records and the National Urban League; and (3) "Family Violence: Breaking the Chain," which was developed and aired by WBZ-TV in Boston.

The chapter concludes with a description of three alternative strategies for using the mass media in violence prevention: (1) generating favorable news coverage to support school and community activities, (2) lobbying the entertainment industry to promote anti-violence themes and images, and (3) creating special programming such as documentaries.

## Walk Away From Violence

The "Walk Away From Violence" campaign was organized in 1991 by the Office on Violence Reduction in the Wayne County, Michigan, Department of Public Health. Developed in collaboration with the Michigan Department of Public Health, the campaign was built on the premise that violence, as a public health problem, is the responsibility of everyone in the community.

Designed to change community attitudes about violence, the campaign is based on the belief that violence is both avoidable and preventable through a combination of individual and community action. Its specific objectives are to draw attention to the problem of interpersonal violence, to announce that a new coalition exists to address the problem, to tell parents and community groups that help and information are available, and to urge teens and young adults to "walk away from violence" and find alternative means of resolving conflict.

The foundation for this ongoing campaign is a four-point work plan organized around the following themes: (1) "Safe Streets," to provide support for neighborhood and youth programs; (2) "Safe at Home," to increase community resources for responding to and preventing domestic violence; (3) "Safe Treatment," to develop a medically oriented curriculum on violence prevention for emergency rooms and other clinical settings; and (4) "Safe to Say," to provide public education through the mass media.

Supported by a mix of state and county funding, the "Safe Streets" initiative was the campaign's primary focus during its first year. A pilot demonstration in two Wayne County communities included:

- Middle school- and high school-based courses in conflict resolution, adapted from the *Violence Prevention Curriculum for Adolescents* (see chapter 4).
- Church-based "rites of passage" programs for boys age 11, designed to instill self-esteem, ethnic and racial pride, and positive community values.
- Neighborhood reconciliation centers, where volunteers could provide a peaceful forum for mediating minor disputes.
- Community forums to educate the public about violence and safety issues and to recruit program volunteers.

As part of this initiative, the campaign staff also assists individual neighborhoods in developing and implementing their own violence prevention programs, especially those focused on improving parenting skills and heightening the self-esteem of young people.

To support the "Safe Streets" initiative, the "Safe to Say" awareness campaign was developed in partnership with Brogan & Partners Communications Consultancy, Inc., an advertising agency located in Southfield, Michigan. The centerpiece of the campaign was three television commercials. According to Wayne County officials, these commercials were meant to counterbalance the romanticized images of violence that often appear on television. Young people must view violence as the wrong way to solve a conflict and learn to "walk away" from potential danger. The campaign also included billboards and posters, which used themes and imagery from the television ads (see figure 5.1).

The television ads aired during the summer of 1991. Roughly $125,000 was spent to buy media time, guaranteeing that the ads would be seen during prime viewing hours rather than during unsold advertising time when there are few television viewers. After three months of prime-time airing, the television stations continued to run the ads during donated time, but records of how frequently that occurred were not kept. In addition, campaign officials sent out over 10,000 posters to

Wayne County middle schools and high schools, police stations, and several community groups.

All of the campaign materials cited a telephone hotline to call for additional information about violence prevention. Approximately 100 calls were received during the three-month campaign from teachers, church leaders, and other professionals interested in joining the anti-violence movement. A "fulfillment package" was sent to the callers with information about the Office on Violence Reduction and the "Safe Streets" program.

A random-digit dial survey of 300 males aged 14–20 was conducted after the campaign had been in place during the summer of 1991. Questions were asked to assess (1) whether the respondents had seen the campaign materials; (2) if so, where; and (3) how effective they thought the materials were in motivating people to change their behavior.

Just under one-third of the respondents could recall and describe elements of the advertising. When presented with descriptions, 90 percent of the respondents said they had seen one or more of the ads. Of those, 85 percent said they

**Figure 5.1: Billboards: Walk Away From Violence Campaign (Detroit, Michigan)**
—Provided by Wayne County Department of Public Health

GET INTO A FIGHT
AND YOUR PARENTS
MAY HAVE TO
GROUND YOU.
FOR INFORMATION ON HOW TO AVOID VIOLENCE CALL:
1·800·537·5666
WAYNE COUNTY OFFICE ON VIOLENCE REDUCTION
AND THE MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH
YOU NEED A GUN
LIKE YOU NEED A HOLE
IN THE HEAD.
WALK AWAY.
DON'T GET CARRIED AWAY.
FOR INFORMATION ON HOW TO AVOID VIOLENCE CALL:
1·800·537·5666
WAYNE COUNTY OFFICE ON VIOLENCE REDUCTION
AND THE MICHIGAN DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

saw the advertising on television, 19 percent on billboards, and 9 percent at school.

Ninety-six percent said that they liked the primary slogan, "Walk Away. Don't Get Carried Away," describing it as realistic, attention-getting, and positive. Fully 69 percent said that they were "personally convinced" by the advertising to avoid violent situations; 61 percent said that they thought the ads would convince others to do the same.[3]

The media campaign had its critics. Garfield, for example, understood that the ads were designed to shame violent youth "out of the twisted bad-is-good social order of the streets" but questioned their effectiveness:

> In a city where gunned-down teen-agers are evening-news boilerplate, a tombstone close-up will terrify nobody and therefore influence nobody. In the utterly irrational context of 15-year-olds shooting each other on the basis of a dirty look, no rational argument or red blotter paper will hold sway.[4]

It may well be true that a media campaign cannot by itself reduce youth violence. But the campaign had other important benefits: it communicated the community's disapproval of violence as a means of solving conflict, and it publicized the new anti-violence coalition and its armamentarium of school and community programs.

## Stop the Violence

On September 10, 1987, a rap concert at Long Island's Nassau Coliseum was taken over by inner-city gangs who went on a spree of robbery, assault, and murder. When news coverage blamed rap music itself for the incident, New York-based music industry leaders saw the need for action, not only to restore rap music's reputation but also to do something positive to help end the epidemic of black-on-black violence.

Taking inspiration from the "We Are the World" fund-raiser, producers at Jive Records, a prominent recording company, took the lead in developing a rap music single, entitled "Self-Destruction," a "hype video," and a companion book under the theme "Stop the Violence." Proceeds from the sale of these materials are donated to the National Urban League to help support a national network of community-based programs focused on preventing black-on-black crime. Sales of the record have exceeded half a million copies, generating over $200,000 for the Urban League's programs.

The song, released on Martin Luther King's birthday in 1989, is intended to make young people aware that violence is unworthy of black youth and, ultimately, self-destructive. A series of rap artists, including Heavy D, Kool Moe Dee, M.C. Lyte, Public Enemy, Young MC, and others, take turns giving their message, written especially for this record. These excerpts are representative:

- KRS-One: "We got ourselves together so that you can unite and fight for what's right, not negative, 'cause the way we live is positive."
- Kool Moe Dee: "I never ever ran from the Ku Klux Klan, and I shouldn't have to run from a Black man..."
- Daddy-O and Wise: "... do a crime, end up in jail, and gotta go 'cause you could do a crime and get paid today, and tomorrow you're behind bars in the worst way."
- Doug E. Fresh: "Word up! It doesn't make you a big man to want to go and dis your brother man..."
- Just-Ice: "You don't have to be soft to be for peace. Robbin' and killin' and murderin' is the least. You don't have to be chained by the beast."
- Heavy D: "I heard a brother shot another. It broke my heart. I don't understand the difficulty, people. Love your brother. Treat him as an equal."

Alternating with these messages is a haunting chorus: "Self-destruction, ya headed for self-destruction. Self-destruction, ya headed for self-destruction."

The book, entitled *Stop the Violence: Overcoming Self-Destruction*, reinforces these themes. Its contents include the lyrics to "Self-Destruction"; statements by the artists about why they participated in the project and what they hope it will accomplish; statistics on black-on-black violence; letters from youth about black-on-black crime, the impact of crack and other drugs on their communities, and related issues, which were written in response to an essay contest sponsored by *Word Up!* magazine; and the story of the Stop the Violence Movement and the making of the video.[5]

As part of this campaign, the National Urban League has sponsored a "National Stop the Violence Awareness Week" for several years, based on the need to increase awareness of the problem, to mobilize community action, and to develop new solutions to interpersonal violence. As part of the awareness week observances, the Urban League's affiliates are asked to sponsor a community youth forum, a two-hour march and rally, or a candlelight vigil, each designed to encourage young people to explore the roles

they can play in eliminating violence. These events are staged in part to generate news coverage in the mass media.

## Family Violence: Breaking the Chain

Local television and radio stations often develop exclusive campaigns that focus a station's energy on a single problem of public concern.[6] In these station-sponsored campaigns, newscasts, documentaries, talk shows, PSAs, and editorials work in sync to inform and motivate the public and to offer solutions, either in the form of individual/collective action or a change in public policy. For some campaigns, the station will work in partnership with business, government, and voluntary organizations to create a direct intervention, such as print materials, school curriculums, and special events. Station managers find that such campaigns serve the station's needs by bringing community recognition and acclaim, which in turn increase ratings for local programs. Corporate sponsors can be asked to provide funding in return for on-air mention of their involvement.[7]

One such campaign was developed by WBZ-TV in Boston with a focus on domestic violence. The WBZ effort began in June 1992 with a locally aired, 90-minute live special, which they called a "fund-raising forum." Simulcast on WBZ-AM radio, the prime-time program had a dual focus: to raise funds for the Jane Doe Safety Fund, a statewide project of the Massachusetts Coalition of Battered Women's Service Groups, and to increase public awareness of the types and extent of domestic violence. Questions from a studio audience and call-ins were fielded by trained counselors and a panel of legal and medical experts. In October 1992, the station sponsored the annual "Walk for Women's Safety," another fund-raising event for the Jane Doe Safety Fund. With the two fund-raisers and other promotions during the last six months of 1992, WBZ brought in over $120,000 for the fund.

Again in October 1992, the station management blocked off half of its paid advertising slots for a day so that it could broadcast instead several "program minutes" about family violence, including child and elder abuse, that would stimulate calls to a telephone "help line." Callers received a resource guide, and, if necessary, emergency counseling from staff made available that day from Boston-area women's shelters. The station received over 700 calls that day, according to WBZ staff.

Aside from these special events, the station frequently airs program minutes, PSAs, news feature stories, and editorials. In April 1993, for example, the news department launched a 10-part series on domestic violence, with stories covering a wide range of treatment, prevention, and criminal justice issues.

## Alternative Media Strategies

Mass media campaigns have traditionally involved the use of public service advertising, including radio and television PSAs, print ads, billboards, posters, and printed literature. More recently, several media experts have argued that campaign planners should think more expansively about how the mass media can be used to reach the public, moving beyond the realm of PSAs to include news and entertainment programming as part of a single, unified campaign.[8]

Three alternative strategies for using the mass media are described here: (1) generating favorable news coverage, (2) lobbying the entertainment industry to reduce media violence and to use storylines with strong anti-violence themes, and (3) creating special programming such as documentaries.

### *Generating News Coverage*

Public health advocates have long recognized the importance of obtaining favorable news coverage to support a health campaign designed to promote behavior change. In recent years, this strategy has been given renewed prominence by public health and safety advocates wanting to promote changes in public policy. What they call media advocacy features a variety of public relations strategies for reframing how the general public and opinion leaders conceptualize a problem and for promoting a consideration of public policy options.[9]

Violence prevention advocates should follow a number of guidelines when seeking news coverage through media advocacy.

Press announcements must present information that has real news value—for example, announcing an upcoming event and inviting the press to cover it, releasing new research findings, issuing a public statement on a news development or issue, or providing background information that gives perspective on late-breaking news.[10] Generally, for health- and safety-related information to be defined as news it must be more than new. The story must also have aspects that make it especially attention-grabbing. Meyer lists several factors that contribute to a story's appeal: timeliness, geographical proximity, prominence of the people involved,

human (emotional) interest, controversy, novelty, and potential impact on people's lives.[11]

Yet another means of generating news coverage is to create "media events" such as receptions, speeches, policy debates, awards ceremonies, or special fund-raising events.[12] Staging events for television is especially important, as stories with a strong visual element are given higher priority.[13]

To maximize its serious consideration, press announcements are best addressed to reporters with whom the campaign planners have established credibility over time, perhaps by serving as a background source for other stories. On occasion, relationships with the press can be nurtured by offering periodic exclusives. Relationships with print reporters are especially critical, since local broadcast media often rely on area newspapers when determining what stories to cover.

Violence prevention advocates should also remember that community newspapers, newsletters, church bulletins, and other neighborhood-based media are also an important source of news information. While these news outlets might not carry the prestige of a major daily newspaper or broadcast station, they can be a more effective means of reaching people in high-risk neighborhoods.

Several violence prevention programs have been successful in generating news coverage. In Wayne County, for example, a press conference was held to launch the television advertising campaign, "Walk Away from Violence." In Chicago, the Community Mental Health Council sponsors a citywide "No Crime Day" as part of its "Black-on-Black Love Campaign," which brings publicity to the council's efforts to involve black professionals in violence prevention.[14]

In considering the advantages and disadvantages of trying to generate supportive news coverage, violence prevention advocates must remember that the news media are an imperfect instrument for communicating health messages.[15] Because news programming thrives on political controversy, it provides limited opportunities for providing clear and consistent health messages.[16]

### *Lobbying the Entertainment Industry*

As the "most effective purveyor of language, image, and narrative in American culture,"[17] television is an important influence in shaping cultural norms, public opinion, and behavior. Television programming not only mirrors social reality but helps shape it, by communicating what constitutes popular opinion and by influencing people's perceptions of the roles and behaviors that are appropriate to members of a culture.[18] For many people—and for children and adolescents especially—television programming is a key source of information about how the world works and how one should behave in that world.[19]

Unfortunately, because plots and script lines are selected primarily for their entertainment and artistic value, much of what is presented on television and the movies is inaccurate, misleading, or antithetical to good health and public safety.[20] Critics of the entertainment industry point to media violence as a prime example of this problem. Defining violence as "any overt act or threat to hurt or kill a person," Gerbner and Signorielli note that the amount of television violence during prime-time hours remained fairly constant between 1967 and 1989, averaging between five and six violent acts per hour.[21]

As described in chapter 2, there are skeptics who doubt that media violence has a causal role in promoting interpersonal violence, but the vast majority of social scientists have concluded that media violence has at least a small impact on aggressive behavior, by cultivating values that favor the use of aggression and by showing violence as a primary and usually successful means of conflict resolution. Accordingly, there has been a new push to change the way in which violence is depicted in television and films.

With funding provided by the Carnegie Corporation of New York, a new program called Mediascope provides forums for researchers, social scientists, and Hollywood producers and writers to discuss media violence and its impact on viewers, with the aim of persuading the entertainment community to portray both the negative consequences of violence and nonviolent means of conflict resolution. The project also provides consulting services to writers, directors, and producers. Similar programs are operated by the Institute for Mental Health Initiatives in Washington, D.C. and by the Center for Health Communication at the Harvard School of Public Health.

Entertainment producers in general have sought to keep outside lobbyists at arms length.[22] As a result, "Hollywood lobbyists" had to devote a number of years to building a small network of supporters in the industry, largely through hosting seminars, panel discussions, or lectures. More recently, however, the most successful lobbying efforts have been set up by industry insiders or greatly assisted by them and have used those personal connections as a basis for private discussions with individual producers.[23] Mediascope is led by a long-time lobbyist who is well known and respected in the entertainment community.

A key issue for Mediascope is why extensive research on media violence has had so little impact on the entertainment industry. One reason is its complexity, which makes it difficult for nonspecialists to interpret. Defenders of the entertainment industry are quick to say that the industry should not be held responsible for the actions of a few "unbalanced" viewers whose criminal behavior might be inspired by a particular film or television program. What this viewpoint ignores, of course, is the gradual and incremental impact that continuous, long-term exposure to media violence can have.[24]

A second reason why past research has had little impact is that entertainment producers see their critics as potential censors and a threat to the industry's economic viability.[25] Actually, responsible critics of the television industry, even the harshest of them, are quick to point out that they prize freedom of speech and do not seek censorship.[26] It is true that, while Mediascope tries to reach Hollywood through education and gentle persuasion, other groups concerned about the content of entertainment programming have used stronger tactics, including boycotts. Such boycotts are controversial, but they do not represent censorship, rather the legitimate rights of citizens to protest a product they do not like.

Enhancing Mediascope's chances of success is an emerging recognition in the entertainment community that there is a public preference for nonviolent, family-oriented entertainment. Medved notes, for example, that only 16 percent of the films released in 1991 carried a "G" or "PG" rating, while 61 percent carried an "R" rating because of their violent and sexual content. Yet, of the top 20 films that year, only 30 percent were "R"-rated, while 40 percent were rated "G" or "PG." Also, while 41 percent of all "R" films generated less than $2 million in box-office receipts, only 28 percent of "PG" films did that poorly.[27] Studies of television programming have also shown negative correlations between amount of violent content and Nielsen ratings.[28] The assumption that violence sells is not borne out by the facts.

### *Developing Special Programming*

Collaboration with the entertainment industry to develop documentaries and other special programming is another option for violence prevention advocates to consider. While programs aired nationally are an occasional possibility,[29] true collaboration is more likely to occur at the local level. Development of local programming is particularly useful for audiences that are not well served by the major networks, such as Latinos.[30] In general, this has been an underutilized strategy by local violence prevention advocates.

An exception is the Boston Violence Prevention Project, which participated in developing an hour-long documentary entitled "Private Violence, Public Crisis" in collaboration with WGBH-TV, Boston's primary public television station. There are two parts. "Teen Violence" is a portrait of two inner-city teenage boys who have found a way out of the street violence that surrounds them. The VPP curriculum is highlighted. "Acquaintance Violence" illustrates the relationship between stress and violence through the story of a young man sentenced at age 22 to life in prison for murdering a coworker. Both program segments are now available for sale through Coronet/MTI in Deerfield, Illinois. Using footage from the documentary, WGBH also produced several one-minute PSAs, one of which provides VPP's telephone number.

## Conclusions

In November 1993, WBZ-TV in Boston announced a new anti-violence campaign called "Action 4 Stop the Violence," which will include in-depth news reports, prime-time specials, PSAs, and community outreach programs. Building on the station's effort against domestic abuse, the aim of the new campaign is to make clear why and how violence happens and how people can stop it from happening to them. WBZ's partner in the campaign is the Harvard Community Health Plan, the Boston area's largest health maintenance organization.

This announcement is an important reminder to violence prevention advocates. While the controversy about the negative impact of media violence is likely to continue, there is no controversy whatsoever about the positive role that the mass media can play in violence prevention. Among those who work in the communications and entertainment industries are people who profoundly care about the well-being of the communities in which they live or work. In increasing numbers, they stand ready to work in partnership with community leaders to stop violence.

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# Chapter 6

# Expanding the Role of Criminal Justice Professionals in Violence Prevention

A missing element in most violence prevention programs, including those described in this report, is the high-profile involvement of criminal justice professionals, especially police officers. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce what that involvement might entail, as criminal justice agencies move beyond merely responding to violence to implementing a fully informed strategy of prevention.

It might seem strange at first to say that criminal justice professionals should be more active in the violence prevention movement, since the traditional purpose of the criminal justice system is to reduce crime through incapacitation and deterrence. A tripling of the average prison time served per violent crime between 1975 and 1989 caused dramatic increases in the prison population. Even so, this did not lead to a decrease in serious violent crime.[1]

A similar state of affairs was found a decade ago in the criminal justice response to illicit substance use. Law enforcement agencies spent millions of dollars each year to control the distribution and sale of illicit drugs. Each year, tons of narcotics were seized; vast sums of cash, weapons, boats, and planes were confiscated; and thousands of arrests were made. Still the drug trade continued to flourish. Law enforcement officials began to realize that until there is a drop in demand they are fighting a war they cannot possibly win.[2]

The principal way to curb the demand for drugs is education. Recognizing this fact, top police administrators in Los Angeles initiated a collaboration with the Los Angeles Unified School District to develop, implement, and evaluate a drug prevention education program that brings police officers into the classrooms as regular instructors.[3] The result of this collaboration was Project DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education), which is now the most prevalent school-based substance abuse prevention program in the United States, taught to over five million school children each year.[4]

The programs reviewed in this report share a common vision, that a key to preventing violence among youth is *education*—teaching young people how to manage their anger and to channel it into constructive problem solving rather than turning to violence as their first response to conflict. In addition, a prevention perspective makes clear that a variety of programs can contribute to violence reduction, not only those that focus specifically on violence but also programs that focus more broadly on problems such as low academic achievement and poor self-esteem.[5]

The idea that criminal justice professionals, especially police, should be involved in violence prevention is consistent with contemporary notions of problem-oriented and community policing, in which police "as individuals and as an institution, can assume an innovative and participatory role in community life."[6] By definition, community policing is focused on long-term solutions to crime problems and requires the enlistment of community help in developing those solutions.[7]

There are several efforts now under way in which police are taking a leadership role in violence prevention, which are reviewed below. To date, however, none of these programs has been evaluated. In general, the field of violence prevention suffers from a dearth of sound outcome evaluations, which obviously retards the emergence of more effective strategies.[8] As criminal justice agencies begin to develop new programs, they must seek or set aside funds for both process evaluations and outcome evaluations that use control group comparisons. Doing so will enable them to establish a leadership position in this field.

## School-Based Strategies

Project DARE (Drug Abuse Resistance Education) has demonstrated that police officers, assigned as full-time in-

structors in the schools, can be profitably involved in substance abuse prevention education.[9] Can they play a similar role in violence prevention?

The Los Angeles DARE program expanded its high school curriculum to include lessons related to violence prevention.[10] In a lesson entitled "Drugs, Media, and Violence," for example, students explore with the police officer: types of violence (verbal, emotional, and physical), consequences of violent behavior, the prevalence of violence among acquaintances, the role of weapon availability, the reasons there is so much violence among teenagers (lack of communication skills to deal with anger and conflict, and tolerance for violence as an accepted norm of behavior), how alcohol and other drug use and media portrayals of aggression contribute to the climate of violence, and ways to prevent violence (such as avoiding certain people and places, not carrying a weapon, and choosing friends who do not use drugs and are not involved in gang activity).

Another lesson focuses on anger management techniques and ways of resolving anger without resorting to violence or substance use. Anger *per se* is not the problem but rather how it is handled. Anger management, the students learn, involves four sets of skills: (1) using deep-breathing, self-instruction ("self-talk"), and other techniques to maintain control; (2) communicating feelings assertively by using "I messages" (see chapter 3); (3) channeling feelings of anger and stress into constructive activities (such as athletics, music, and art); and (4) directly confronting an anger-provoking situation by negotiating a nonviolent, win-win solution.

As in the *Violence Prevention Curriculum for Adolescents*, described in chapter 4, students also videotape role-plays of conflicts. On the first day of the lesson, the students act out the role-plays as written, with the conflicts escalating to the brink of violence. On the second day, they act out the same role-plays, this time using a strategy that avoids violence, such as using humor, apologizing, and negotiating a solution to the conflict.

This expansion of the DARE high school curriculum is helpful, but a more extensive program is needed. First, students need extensive practice to master the complex skills involved in nonviolent conflict resolution, far more than this brief curriculum currently allows.

Second, students need to begin learning these skills when they are younger, well before high school. DARE's central curriculum focuses on grades 5 and 6, the so-called exit grades prior to junior high school. Expanding its lessons to include violence prevention skills could be an important step.

Third, regular classroom teachers need to learn how to support a transfer of training from the lessons to the children's everyday conduct. As shown by the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP), described in chapter 3, school-based programs should do more than present lessons on conflict resolution; their objective should be nothing less than to create school change.

Police officers can help here too, by modeling lessons, coaching the teachers in presenting them, and illustrating how to manage conflict among the students. The officers can also be a conduit for sharing ideas and techniques among teachers who do not have a chance to meet with one another or to observe each other's classes.[11]

Even when police officers are not the primary instructors, they can play a key role in school-based programs. For example, although RCCP has not yet involved police or other criminal justice professionals, their participation could enhance the program through presenting special classes or assemblies, training and supervising peer mediators, or parent training. As with DARE, a chief advantage of their involvement would be the authority and expertise that they bring to the subject, especially as perceived by the students.

## Community-Based Strategies

Community policing programs offer many opportunities for police and other criminal justice officials to be involved in community-based violence prevention. Going beyond a traditional volunteer role, some police departments have begun to assign officers to run sports and recreation programs and to work one-on-one with at-risk youth as tutors or mentors. Through such programs, the officers can help young people learn anger management, conflict resolution, and other "life skills." They can guide them toward more thoughtful life choices, and they can simply be there to listen.[12]

The need for such programs was eloquently expressed by Prothrow-Stith and Weissman:

> All adolescents need adults very much. . . They need adults to inspire them, to help them interpret life's confusion, and to lead them to an understanding of what goals are worthy. When inspiring adults are missing, a terrible emptiness may exist in the center of a child's life, an emptiness that he or she may fill by

doing and becoming precisely what will most hurt himself and others.[13]

Mentoring programs are taking on increasing importance in inner-city communities, where many youth are at risk for violence, substance use, and other problems.[14]

### *Boston, Massachusetts*

As part of its neighborhood policing strategy, the Boston Police Department recently announced the deployment of 10 youth services officers, one for each of the city's 10 police districts.[15] All 10 officers volunteered for the position. With 112 hours of training behind them, the officers' job is to reach out to young people by serving as positive role models, speaking against drugs in fifth-grade classes, and referring high-risk youth to public and private social services agencies. Importantly, the officers are expected to develop their own after-school and weekend programs for elementary and middle-school children. Extra hours, without overtime compensation, are considered part of the job.

### *Columbia, South Carolina*

The Columbia Police Department operates substations at several city housing projects. Over time, the substations have emerged as a nexus for a variety of activities that enhance the life of the community. Officers participate in youth athletic activities, make school visits, and cosponsor social activities such as camping trips, community talent shows, dances, movie matinees, and puppet shows. The officers also serve as mentors, taking special interest in the children and their school work.[16]

### *Houston, Texas*

The Police Activities League (PAL) is another notable law enforcement program[17] that could incorporate the teaching of anger management and conflict resolution skills. Presently, there are over 500 PAL programs nationally, serving in excess of three million youth.

In Houston, the police department assigned four full-time officers to run a year-round PAL program for high-risk youth ages 12–17 from inner-city communities. In addition to sports, the program also features numerous educational field trips and community service projects such as neighborhood clean-ups. Parents help out as assistants to the officers. Currently, the program serves 700–900 youth per year.

The key to the program is day-to-day, one-on-one interaction between the officers and the participants. As one officer explained, the officers serve as positive role models, but at the same time, the kids get to know them as human beings, not just as police officers. According to the project's leadership, sports are the magnet that attracts young people. Then, as part of the program, the officers are able to interject discussions on values, character, responsibility, and the importance of helping others.

### *Jacksonville, Florida*

With its Youth Intervention Program, officers from the Jacksonville Sheriff's Office meet informally after school with young men aged 12–18 from low-income, gang-plagued neighborhoods.[18] The emphasis is on talking and listening, with the officers working as mentors to strengthen the young men's self-esteem, increase their awareness of the consequences of violence, and provide informal guidance on a range of safety and health topics. The program also provides vocational training, with several community business partners creating work opportunities for the participants.

These examples illustrate that police and other criminal justice professionals have an important role to play in community-based violence prevention, in essence by restoring and helping sustain community life.[19] As these and other programs continue to evolve, it is essential that they link up with indigenous coalitions, which must take the lead in improving neighborhood conditions.[20]

## Mass Media Strategies

Police and other criminal justice professionals can also take an active role in creating mass media campaigns against violence. For example, the Minnesota Crime Prevention Officers Association (MCPOA) organized a "Turn Off the Violence" campaign, in part to raise parents' awareness of what their children watch and hear in the entertainment media.[21] Using a variety of public relations strategies, the association asked people not to watch or listen to violent entertainment media for a single day, October 3, 1991. Leading up to the target date, the association distributed information packets to promote the campaign. During the preceding week, crime prevention, DARE, and juvenile officers gave anti-violence presentations to students.

There are two other possibilities to consider here. First, criminal justice officials can seek collaborations with local

broadcasters to develop station-sponsored campaigns on violence prevention, similar to the WBZ-TV campaign on domestic violence described in chapter 5. As noted, the best of these campaigns use on-air promotion to leverage school- or community-based activities.

Second, criminal justice professionals can take the lead in creating school-based "media literacy" programs to teach children and their parents how to critically analyze the content and structure of movies and television programming, with the goal of immunizing them against its negative effects.[22]

Media literacy programs are usually associated with substance abuse prevention programs. In Project DARE, for example, an entire lesson is devoted to media influences on drug use, with the DARE officer focusing on strategies employed by advertisers to promote certain products (such as the "bandwagon approach" and testimonials from celebrities). Through example, the DARE officer helps students see through these strategies.

Next, the DARE students work in groups to create an anti-alcohol or anti-drug commercial, using the techniques employed by professional advertisers. As homework, the students describe a television commercial or magazine ad, noting which strategies are employed and what perceptions of the product the advertisers want to promote.[23]

A media literacy program focused on violence prevention and conflict resolution should seek to prevent several effects of television and film violence. For example, according to a recent review of the literature, heavy viewing of television violence can lead to exaggerated notions of both the appropriateness and prevalence of violence in the real world and to unrealistic fears of becoming a victim of violence. Heavy viewing of television violence has also been found to harden young viewers to expect and passively accept violent behavior displayed by others without acting to prevent or end it.[24]

There might be several advantages of having such a program taught by criminal justice professionals rather than regular classroom teachers, chief among them being the authority and expertise they bring to the subject. If that were done, the program could be broadened to include the variety of ways in which television and films misrepresent the law and the workings of the criminal justice system.

## The Continuing Challenge

To a large extent, the programs listed in this chapter focus on reaching the individual child. Giving individualized attention to at-risk youth is essential, of course.[25] But as the prevention perspective makes clear, we must also address the multitude of environmental conditions that promote or inhibit the learning and maintenance of aggression.[26]

In part, this requires that we try to change the overall climate of violence that drives antisocial behavior. Indeed, this is the broader lesson taught by the two main programs featured in this report, the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program in New York City (chapter 3), which emphasizes school change, and the Boston Violence Prevention Project (chapter 4), which emphasizes community coalition building.

More than that, we must also address the social and economic conditions that feed the Nation's climate of violence.[27] Those who are at greatest risk of violent death and injury are the poor (see chapter 2). Ultimately, then, we must not only impose fair, swift, and sure punishment for criminal behavior; we must not only teach young people how to manage their anger and channel it into constructive problem solving; we must also work toward improving educational opportunities, better housing, and economic development.[28]

There is a role for police and other criminal justice professionals here, too. Working in concert with community leaders, they must become advocates for the neighborhoods they serve. Ultimately, that is what community policing is all about.

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# Appendix A:

# Second Step (Seattle, Washington)

Second Step is a school-based prevention curriculum for elementary school students developed by the Committee for Children, a not-for-profit organization in Seattle. The curriculum has been implemented in a number of cities in both the United States and Canada. Its most widespread use is in the Los Angeles school system, where nearly 350,000 students in grades K–6 receive the program each year.

This research-based program is designed to teach children the "ABCs" of interpersonal relationships, with the ultimate objective of reducing impulsive and aggressive behavior. The curriculum centers on teaching anger management, impulse control, empathy, problem-solving skills, and social skills (such as how to interrupt politely, how to enter a play situation, and how to deal with name-calling).

The committee sells four Second Step packages: preschool and kindergarten, grades 1–3, grades 4–5, and grades 6–8.[1] The lessons are designed for school teachers and other youth service professionals to present in a classroom or other group setting (such as youth homes, detention centers, YMCAs, and other community centers). All of the materials are developmentally sequenced. Learning objectives and classroom activities are matched to the children's social and academic capabilities.

Each curriculum package is divided into three major units. In the empathy unit, students learn to identify and predict the feelings of others and to provide an appropriate emotional response. In the impulse control unit, students learn problem-solving and communication skills, with a focus on how to handle and solve interpersonal conflict. In the anger management unit, students learn techniques for reducing stress and channeling angry feelings into constructive problem solving.

Customarily presented once or twice a week, the lessons are designed to last 40–50 minutes each. They can be integrated into language arts, social studies, or health education courses. A variety of learning modalities are used so that children are exposed to appropriate role models, have opportunities to practice new skills, and receive reinforcement for prosocial behavior.

The curriculum packages also include audiovisual materials. For example, the grades 6–8 package uses a live action video, entitled "Check It Out," which presents step-by-step modeling of behavioral skills, such as how to make a complaint, deal with peer pressure, and avoid a fight. For grades 2–6, the video "Facing Up" models specific social skills needed to deal with bullying and other types of peer conflict. In the preschool/kindergarten program, hand puppets are used to teach children to "slow down, stop, and think."

The lessons are carefully constructed. For example, in the preschool/kindergarten package, each lesson is printed on a large, laminated card. On the front, there is a black-and-white photograph that depicts one or more children in a social situation. On the back of the card, information for the teacher appears in three sections:

1. Background information, which is to be read prior to the lesson, includes goals of the overall curriculum unit, objectives for this particular lesson, concepts and vocabulary to be introduced, a list of needed materials (such as props and handouts), and special reminder notes.

2. The lesson itself includes a warm-up activity (involving puppetry, games, or songs); the text of a story that goes with the photograph, plus discussion questions; and role-play activities focused on new skills.

3. Reinforcement activities, which are designed to fortify the concepts and skills presented in the lesson, includes suggestions for encouraging prosocial skill development during class, on the playground, and at home, plus a list of suggested children's books.

The curriculum packages for grades 1–3 and 4–5 also follow this format. Lessons for the grades 6–8 curriculum are

organized in a three-ring binder and utilize overhead transparencies.

Each package has a teacher's guide, which offers a description of each teaching unit, background information, suggestions and resources for handling difficult classroom situations, homework assignments, parent activity sheets, and take-home letters to inform parents about the curriculum. The packages are self-contained and therefore easy to implement. Everything the teacher needs to prepare is there.

Training sessions offered by the Committee for Children[2] focus on curriculum strategies and how to reinforce students' prosocial behavior during regular classes. For example, to reinforce an earlier lesson on sharing, the students might be asked to imagine everything they will be doing that day and then to say which of those activities will provide opportunities for sharing. During the day, the teacher will praise children who share, reminding them in each case of the direct benefits of sharing. As class ends, the students are asked to remember what they did that day and to report which children shared.

Pilot tests of all four curriculums show evidence of gains in both knowledge and behavioral skills. For example, a study of the preschool/kindergarten package showed that, in answering questions about photographs that depicted social situations, children who had been taught the Second Step curriculum were better able to list cues associated with different actors' feelings, to generate solutions to a conflict, to make socially appropriate requests, to demonstrate group entry skills, and to list ways to calm down when angry. An evaluation in Los Angeles also showed strong teacher endorsement for Second Step.[3]

The Committee for Children is undertaking several steps to improve the Second Step program. They plan to assess the curriculum training provided by those the Committee itself has trained. They plan to evaluate whether, in fact, the curriculum is being taught as intended. They are exploring how to implement a system of technical assistance and support for teachers who are trying the curriculum for the first time. They are also developing a video-based education program to help parents reinforce the Second Step lessons.

## Endnotes

1. Spanish-language supplements are available for the preschool/kindergarten, grades 1–3, and grades 4–5 packages.

2. The Committee offers a one-day introduction for classroom teachers and a three-day training for trainers.

3. K. M. Wulf, 1989–90 Year End Evaluation Report on Drug-Free Schools: A Grant to the Los Angeles Unified School District, (Los Angeles: LAUSD, September 1990).

# Appendix B:

# Youth at Risk Program (San Francisco, California)

The Youth at Risk (YAR) program was started in 1982 by the Breakthrough Foundation in San Francisco, with original project sites in Oakland and San Jose. Replication in other California cities began in 1983, and the program eventually expanded nationwide. Currently, the most active project sites are Oahu, Philadelphia, Phoenix, and San Jose.

Local YAR programs are set up as not-for-profit corporations and are run for the most part by volunteers. Typically, a local program will hire between one and three staff (which might include an executive director, a manager for the mentor program, and an administrative assistant) to administer the program.

The young people served by the YAR programs are primarily minority urban youth from disadvantaged backgrounds. A typical project site will serve 30–85 youth per year, with an average of about 50. Phoenix and Oahu, the largest programs, will soon have approximately 100 participants per year.

YAR begins with a four- to seven-day residential program in a camp setting. The camp is staffed by local volunteers and a project team from the Breakthrough Foundation, which is contracted by the local program to provide the training. The camp is an intensive experience, with course instruction, guided group discussions, and rigorous physical activities, including a one-day "ropes course." Some lectures are given, but most of the time is spent in large, interactive group discussions.

The instructional sessions focus on the young people's life experience and how it shaped any self-defeating conclusions they have reached about themselves and their futures. The objective is to help the participants reach a "breakthrough," which gives them a different view of their potential. The participants focus next on goals and aspirations and make plans for the upcoming year—for example, getting back into school, giving up violence as a way of resolving conflict, and improving relations with their parents and other family members. These action plans are a major program focus during the subsequent school year.

Back home, each YAR program designs its own follow-up activities. Usually, there are monthly group meetings and community projects, such as cleaning up graffiti or working with younger kids as peer leaders. About half of those who attend the residential program also participate during the school year.

Local volunteers serve as mentors, first as part of the residential program, then during the follow-up year. Each mentor agrees to meet or otherwise be in touch with an assigned participant three times a week. This extensive contact is essential to help the participants keep alive their new way of thinking about themselves until they internalize it. The mentors also direct youth to other people or agencies for specific help they might need (such as literacy training or drug treatment).

Parent involvement is encouraged. The local programs conduct an initial orientation for parents and a second meeting about halfway through the residential program. Typically, about half of the parents attend. Parents are also invited to attend the monthly follow-up meetings with their sons and daughters.

Unfortunately, local groups receive little help from the Breakthrough Foundation in setting up the follow-through activities, which means that they are of uneven quality from site to site. Staff are available for consultation but make no special effort to involve themselves with the follow-through activities. This may soon change, however; the foundation is now developing a manual for this aspect of the program.

Evaluations of the original 10-day program, all showing positive results, have been conducted of individual pro-

grams.[1] It should be noted, however, that the program recently has been cut back to four to seven days in order to reduce costs. These shorter programs have yet to be evaluated formally.

## Endnote

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# Appendix C:

# Program Directory

*Boston Police Youth Corps*

Detective George Noonan
Coordinator
Boston Police Department
154 Berkeley Street
Boston, Massachusetts 02116
(617) 343-4200

*Boston Violence Prevention Project*

Linda Bishop Hudson
Director
Health Promotion Program for Urban Youth
1010 Massachusetts Avenue
Boston, Massachusetts 02118
(617) 534-5196

*Columbia Community Policing Program in Public Housing*

Sergeant Y.T. Young
Columbia Police Department
1409 Lincoln Street
Columbia, South Carolina 29201
(803) 733-8479

*Family Violence: Breaking the Chain*

Lois Roach
Public Service Director
WBZ-TV4
1170 Soldiers Field Road
Boston, Massachusetts 02134
(617) 787-7092

*Houston Area Exchange Club*

Officer Mark Whitmore
Police Activities League (PAL), Inc.
P.O. Box 2228
Houston, Texas 77252
(713) 222-2725

*Mediascope*

Marcy Kelly
Director
12711 Ventura Boulevard
Suite 250
Studio City, California 91604
(818) 508-2080

*Project DARE*
*(Drug Abuse Resistance Education)*

Glenn Levant
DARE America
12800 Culver Boulevard
Los Angeles, California 90066
(310) 277-2171

*Resolving Conflict Creatively Program*

Linda Lantieri
Director
RCCP National Center
163 Third Avenue, #103
New York, New York 10003
(212) 387-0225

*Second Step: A Violence Prevention Curriculum*

Karen Bachelder
Director
Committee for Children
172 20th Avenue
Seattle, Washington 98122
(206) 322-5050

*Stop the Violence*

National Urban League, Inc.
500 East 62nd Street
New York, New York 10021
(212) 310-9000

*Turn Off the Violence*

Minnesota Crime Prevention Officers' Association
P. O. Box 27558
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55427
(612) 593-8041

*Walk Away From Violence*

Alan F. Tumpkin
Coordinator
Office on Violence Reduction
Wayne County Department of Public Health
2501 South Merriman Road
Westland, Michigan 48185
(313) 467-3300

*Youth at Risk Program*

Clinton Terrell
Executive Director
Breakthrough Foundation
1952 Lombard Street
San Francisco, California 94123
(415) 673-0171

*Youth Intervention Program*

Sergeant R. L. Drummond
Community Affairs Division
Jacksonville Sheriff's Office
501 East Bay Street, Room 204
Jacksonville, Florida 32202
(904) 630-2160



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